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AUGUST 1, 1922

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Saucy Stories



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Color	lead the glass	lead the glass	translucent white
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AUGUST 1, 1922

VOL. XIII, No. 2

Twice a Month **Saucy Stories** Twice a Month

Please address all manuscripts to "Editor of SAUCY STORIES"

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Four-o'Clock

By Leslie Nelson Jennings

CINNAMON toast and macaroons,
And little fingers crooked precisely—
At Mila's Thursday afternoons
We all say nothing very nicely!

Let old cats purr and praise the brew,
While teacups pass and silver's clinking;
That's Mila's four o'clock, where you
Can't guess what anybody's thinking!

She understands my patience; yes,
And her bright smile has told me plainly
That I will not go comfortless,
That I will not have suffered vainly!

Oh, what care I how many bores
Corner me in the hurly-burly,
So long as lovely Mila pours—
And I stay late, and they go early!



No Place for Husbands

By Russell Holman

CHAPTER I



WHEN the five most expensive medical specialists ever assembled under one roof gave John R. Harlan up for lost and the old gentleman preserved their reputations by passing gently away two days

later, the Broadway-after-midnight set lost one of its picturesque members.

Not old John R. himself—my, no! He had always been too busy guarding the Harlan millions and the half-century-old banking house of Harlan & Co. to give ear to the jazzy call of the wild. No; John R. had led as calm and Comstockian a social life as a Brooklyn tinsmith.

If the financier had ever experienced an urge to dash out and sow a wild oat or two, the seed had all been passed along to his son Jack—that is, the Jack of the pre-1915 era.

During Jack Harlan's prep-school days at Lawrenceville, he first began to plumb, in vacation periods, the fizzy world that lay behind the blinking lights of Broadway and learned that almost any chorus girl would forget almost anything for a good-looking youth with a quota of the Harlan fortune lining his pockets.

By the time he reached freshman year at Princeton, Jack had graduated into leading ladies and stars and, as an alternative to the footlight cuties, was gadding about from cabaret to cab with the flapper society set.

His first year out of college Jack

devoted exclusively to his two worlds of pleasure. Musical comedy queens passed the word around that he was "a nice kid." Underdressed dowagers titled him "a wild, quite irresponsible young man, my dear." Flappers felt a thrill at being seen with such a handsome Don Juan. And John R. Harlan, after trying threats, pleading and bluster to get his son to settle down in the banking business, gave up the task.

Having completed Broadway, the Westchester roadhouse sector, and Greenwich Village, Jack set out gaily for Paris under some such alibi as "studying art," purposing to do most of his "studying" at the Folies Bergere and the demi-mondained cafés of the Quartier Latin.

A cablegram reached him on the day he landed at Cherbourg. It announced the sudden, serious illness of his father. Jack caught the next steamer home, arriving in time for ten minutes of conversation before the stricken man lapsed into permanent unconsciousness.

During those ten minutes Jack Harlan's attitude on life abruptly changed. The old man used his last seconds on earth to pour his heart out to his son. Carefree Jack had always loved his father, and he had never before realized what Harlan & Co. meant to a Harlan.

A week later the young man rode soberly down to Wall Street in the subway and walked into the stern stone banking building of Harlan & Co. He presented himself to Amos Farraday, the senior vice-president and his father's closest friend, and announced that he wanted to learn the business.

Farraday was pleased, though skeptical, and took Jack for a trial.

In a year Jack Harlan had disappeared, and John R. Harlan, rising young financier, had stepped into his place. Jack's frivolous past was as dead as if he had suffered a stroke of mental aphasia.

Farraday and the others were frankly astounded. But young Harlan had brains, he had inherited much of his father's natural flair for finance, and, once his veneer of frothiness was rubbed off by hard work, his progress was not so astonishing as it seemed.

There was no question about the hard work. Jack never appeared at the twelve-till-daylight resorts. When he went to the theater, it was to sit in a box with Farraday or some other safe-and-sane business acquaintance.

In two years Farraday was giving him responsible work to do. Then John—"Jack" seems out of place now—went to war as a lieutenant of artillery. He came back with his ambition to take his late father's place in Harlan & Co. unchanged.

Farraday was getting old. The name of John R. Harlan began to appear upon the directorates of some of the Harlan companies once more.

CHAPTER II

It was about eight years after he had thrown the jazz-life overboard that John married.

He was twenty-eight, a full-fledged partner in the Harlan banking-house. If Wall Street had once laughed at the idea of wild Jack Harlan succeeding to his father's position in the world of money, it had since changed its tune. John had inherited the Harlan money and keenness. "Better see old Harlan," which for many years had been a kind of slogan in financial circles, and which for a time had been altered to "Better see Farraday," was now "Better see young Harlan."

During John's renaissance Amos

Farraday, once convinced that he was in earnest, had been friend as well as mentor. Farraday, who was a widower, often invited John out to dinner at his big house in upper Fifth Avenue or at the Union League Club. They would continue their discussions over long, black cigars, which John at first disliked heartily to smoke but decided were rather more diplomatic than cigarettes.

At dinner one evening at Farraday's John met Margery.

"My daughter—home from Wellesley for a holiday," Farraday introduced her, frank pride in his voice.

A few months previous John's pulse would have raced at the sight of such a girl as Margery. And he would have started glibly, adroitly, to interest her. At that, his heart skipped a beat or two. But Harlan quickly brought it back to normalcy by assuring it that there was no room in his present scheme of things for girls—especially very pretty girls with creamy skin and large blue eyes and golden hair as smooth as velvet, like Margery's. He attacked his grapefruit earnestly and said little more than the conventions required.

She went back to college, and it was not until her summer vacation began, six months later, that John saw her again—this time at the Farradays' summer home on Long Island Sound. He spent a week-end there and discovered some reassuring things about Margery.

She wasn't a flapper. Her stockings reached above her knees, and she didn't don spinster-shocking, thigh-high bathing-suits nor snuggle cigarettes out in the canoe with her. She was rather serious-minded, though not oppressively so, and quite keen for things like family, good taste, and morality. She was small, trim, and completely beautiful.

John decided that even a sober young financier was quite safe in not battling

the overwhelming impulse to fall in love with her.

A month after he returned from the war to Harlan & Co., he took up with Margery where he had left off.

The setting was an engulfing divan in front of a crackling fire in the Farraday living-room. He moved closer to her.

"I say, Margery—I guess you know I love you," John, once so skilful with women, fumbled. And added, brightly, "Don't you?"

Margery, the yellow glow from the logs showed, was mildly excited. Likewise a little troubled, as if this were an agreeable, but disturbing, thing with which she had expected to conjure some time. But she answered bravely:

"I know you do, John." Then allowing her heart to usurp her tongue, "I—I love you too, John," and yielding her lips to his and her soft body to his embrace.

When John had departed, Margery invaded her father's library. She climbed upon the arm of the great leather chair in which Farraday was perusing a financial journal.

"John has just asked me to marry him," she announced.

Her father smiled as if this announcement were neither displeasing nor unexpected.

"I'm glad," he said simply, and then, looking at her more closely, "but why so serious-looking about it?"

Margery placed an affectionate arm around his shoulder.

"Why, it's something I *should* be serious about, isn't it, dad?"

"Of course—but you love John?"

"Yes." Margery slipped half into his lap. "Dad, wasn't John once sort of wild? Didn't he use to play the Broadway cabarets and go around with actresses and all that? Mrs. Schuyler Hicks was telling me the other day—"

"Don't believe what those old frumps tell you, Margery. I dare say the boy

was somewhat of a high-flyer in college and the first year or so after he got out—what youngster with too much money isn't? But he settled down when his father died, and I'll vouch for it that he's been pretty near a model young man ever since."

"You don't think there's a chance of John's—well—backsliding—longing for a touch of the old life, do you, dad? I should die if—"

Farraday laughed and kissed her cherry mouth.

"I should say not! John's one hundred percent business now. Don't worry your little head about such things. If you love him, marry him."

So she did.

They journeyed to Bermuda on their honeymoon—John's first long outing in many years—and by the time they returned, their cozy new home at Long Hills, in Jersey, within easy commuting distance of Wall Street, was completed.

CHAPTER III

JOHN HARLAN decided that he was ideally happy. He had one of the nicest homes in plutocratic Long Hills; he thought no woman could possibly be so naïvely charming as Margery; and Harlan & Co. was going like a house afire.

Margery managed the corps of servants like a little blonde Napoleon. John's Wall Street Journal was always by his breakfast table; the butler awaited him at the door with his hat and stick in the morning, so that there was no possible chance of his missing his train, and collected them at night. The Harlans played billiards, golf, and double-dummy bridge together for six months without a single altercation. This is probably a record.

There was a single disturbing thing about Margery. Even about this, John didn't quite know whether to be annoyed or flattered.

He became aware of it first at a Saturday evening dance at the Long Hills Country Club. Mingling among the smart crowd on the clubhouse veranda, John was introduced by a neighbor, with slightly malicious aforethought, to a nineteen-year-old flapper named Gladys Greyson.

Gladys possessed a long, slender chassis, black curly bobbed hair, flirty eyes, and a weakness for good-looking men older than herself. She had absorbed two rather hefty slugs of gin out of her last partner's flask.

"I bet you shake a mean toddle, Mr. Harlan," she gushed, immediately upon sizing him up as a new and excellent prospect. "Come on—le's go."

A negro band, imported from Broadway, was emitting spasms of synopated din. Gladys tugged at John's elbow; she placed an expectant arm about his shoulder. He felt that there was no help for it. So he danced.

As they wove in and out over the crowded floor, Gladys rested a flushed cheek against his chin, and John wondered if she intended to fall asleep in his arms. Then he caught a glimpse of Margery dancing sedately with a white-haired gentleman. And the eyes of Margery were upon Gladys and Gladys' partner, and the eyes were quite horrified and reproachful.

Margery said nothing about it until she and John were preparing for bed early Sunday morning.

"Did you enjoy your dance with Miss Greyson, John?" she asked innocently.

"Can't say that I did," he answered promptly. "She was half boiled."

He wondered why his wife had taken the trouble to discover the flapper's name.

There were several other occasions; He, of necessity, held Polly Armitage's hands while he was teaching her the proper way to grasp a niblick, and a troubled, reproachful look came into

the eyes of Margery, who was standing near.

He had discussed investments with rich, vivacious Mrs. Paton in a rather dark corner of the clubhouse veranda, because there were no vacant chairs anywhere else, and Margery, discovering them, had betrayed by her manner that she thought they were talking something less impersonal than bonds.

It dawned upon John that his wife was jealous in a vague, well-bred way of any woman who paid unusual attention to him. She seemed to feel that he needed protection against their designs, real or fancied. Not that Margery's solicitude made him impatient. He loved her the more for it and vowed that he would not cast as much as an appraising glance at another woman, even though flapperdom's loveliest were to toss themselves at his curly black head.

CHAPTER IV

JOHN HARLAN had bad news. He hadn't possessed the nerve to spring it upon Margery at dinner the evening previous. They had not spent a single night apart since their wedding, and he knew that she would feel as badly about it as he did. So he saved the news for breakfast, when the necessity of making his train would get it over with quickly.

"I've got to take a little trip to California soon, Margery, dear," he said across the table to her as casually as possible.

"Why, John, are you ill?" alarmed.

"Oh, no—business. One of our big subsidiaries, the Pacific Fruit Company, is to be reorganized. Somebody from the office has to be on the spot to handle the thing. Your father doesn't feel equal to the trip, so I'll have to tackle it. I'm awfully sorry."

Margery told herself firmly that she was no weepy Victorian bride.

"Where in California, dear—San Francisco? And when do you start?"

John, tossing aside his napkin, quite ignored the sedate butler and, easing around the table, lifted Margery's tulip-petaled chin in his hands and kissed her upon the lips.

"It's Los Angeles, dear, and I must start day after tomorrow. It'll be hot as the dickens going out on the Santa Fe, but it's the only route."

Margery looked up at him cautiously. "You wouldn't like me to go with you?"

"I really don't think it would be wise, dear," he said sincerely. "Eight days in stuffy Pullmans for forty-eight hours in Los Angeles, with the temperature there about a hundred and ten—you wouldn't like it."

She agreed—a bit reluctantly.

The next night she helped him pack his bag, and in the morning accompanied him in to the Pennsylvania Station, in New York. He kissed her good-by many times, but just before the ruthless gate clanged between them she thought of something more:

"John, Los Angeles is where the movies are, isn't it? You won't fall in love with any of those pretty stars, will you?" Behind her banter, John recalled later, there was a somewhat anxious tremor.

CHAPTER V

JOHN described his four days in a dusty Pullman minutely to Margery in letters mailed from Chicago, Kansas City, Dodge City, Albuquerque and Los Angeles.

Arrived at his destination, he discovered, to his chagrin, that the re-financing of the Pacific Fruit Company would be a far messier matter than he had anticipated. Four days of intensive conferences in stuffy rooms—and the end was not yet.

John's brain was fagged and in need

of stimulant. The other banking men, being congenial old boys and appreciating Harlan's importance, were quite willing to entertain him during his few leisure hours. But he thought it wise not to accept. He expected every day to be his last in Los Angeles, and he did not wish to make any encumbering engagements. Evenings he spent in his room at the luxurious Hotel Envoy thinking up new things to write to Margery and working on the re-financing papers. At ten o'clock he turned in, the blistering heat of the day having been succeeded by the cool, sleepable evening that the California boosters cherish so highly.

So far, outside of business acquaintances, he hadn't spoken to a soul. Harlan, naturally friendly and gregarious, was in need of a familiar voice and a little non-business companionship.

Which is probably the chief reason why he didn't follow his first impulse and turn an arctic shoulder to Peggy Du Bois when she tripped by on her way to a vacant table and discovered him dawdling over an after-dinner cigar in a comparatively cool corner of the Envoy dining-room.

"Why, Jack Harlan!" cried halting Peggy, recognition suddenly leaping into her lively black eyes. "Haven't seen you in a pup's age."

John had always possessed a Roth-like memory: Peggy Du Bois—Folies—played around with her when he was at Princeton—a game, good scout. Well, after all, why not? He was three thousand miles away from home, and lonesome. She was diverting, and as young and pretty as ever. He could at least talk with her for a moment.

He intended to say, "How do you do, Miss Du Bois," but as he rose and her friendly face came closer he heard himself greeting her cheerfully, "Why, hello, Peggy—had your dinner?" She hadn't, and accepted the chair opposite him.

John leaned back and allowed her to do the talking. She chattered amiably through the oysters and heavy, expensive stuff to demi-tasse and cigarette. Her language was slangily picturesque; it was a relief to John's figures-filled brain.

Peggy was in the movies, she told him—Hal Harris comedies—wore a one-piece bathing-suit and cavorted spicily before the camera at Venice and other beach resorts. Her present job was somewhat of a comedown for her, she assured him, but "times be tough, and ladies must live."

"How about you, Jack?" she inquired. "You're married, aren't you? I've seen pictures of you and her in the Sunday picture sections. She's awful cute. I've heard about the big-league things you've been pulling off in Wall Street, too. Broker friend of mine here in Los Angeles says you're the smartest banking man in America.

"Lord—imagine that! And a couple of years ago I was getting stewed with you at Bustanoby's and stuffing in wheat cakes at the Fifty-ninth Street Childs' at four in the morning, and keeping just enough sense in my head to prevent the taxi driver from robbing you of your last nickel. Oh, boy—the world do move, and some go up and some go down.

"But honest, Jack, I *am* proud of you—when I find your photo in the paper, along with a lot of other stiff-bosomed gents, I show it to the other girls and state, 'Well, mesdames, not long ago I—in person—was playing around with that wealthy lad.'"

At first this vivacious ghost from his past visibly disturbed John. It didn't seem honorable for him to be dining with an ex-chorine and listening to jazzful memoirs of their past. He had long since parted with all that. But it was good to hear a friendly voice. And he hadn't heard anything like Peggy's stimulating patois for several years.

He paid the check and said, "Same old Peggy, aren't you? Come on—let's dance."

In the middle of *Sweet Lady*, Peggy sighed and declared, "You always were a wonderful dancer, Jack."

He was pleased as a kid. Why hadn't Margery ever told him that?

When they parted at about eleven, Peggy asked, "Why don't you come out and see me work, Jack? I look spiffy as ever in my dishably. You've never seen movies in the making, have you? Come tomorrow."

"Impossible, Peggy—I'm sorry. I'm counting on finishing up tomorrow and leaving for New York."

She pouted invitingly. "It seems a darned shame to have to leave you so soon—after not seeing you for ages." A sigh and a Frenchy shrug. "Well, if you should have a second to spare—Hal Harris studio, Selma Avenue, Hollywood, is the address. Ask anybody you see how to get there."

She was stopping at the Envoy for the night and wondered, half hopeful, half amused, if he would kiss her at the door. He didn't—and passed on to his own room.

CHAPTER VI

JOHN's business conference the following day lasted until noon. Then further action was postponed until the next morning, pending the arrival of an important banking man from San Francisco. Harlan wondered what he would do with himself in the meantime, after writing his daily stint to Margery.

He had resolved to think no more about Peggy Du Bois. But over a lonesome cigar at lunch he permitted himself to toy with her suggestion that he visit the studio. He framed an alibi. Harlan & Co. handled the financing of several motion picture concerns. It was his duty, only thirty minutes from movieland, to view something of the

industry at first hand. His conscience was quite alabaster as he hired a machine at two o'clock and bade the chauffeur to drive to the Hal Harris studio.

A swift run over a hard, dusty road, and John was walking under a high wooden arch onto the Harris "lot." He entered the door marked "Office" in a low, single-storied building. Near the door a shirt-sleeved young man with a cold cigarette stuck between his lips was clacking a typewriter. He looked at Harlan—looked again—and stood up respectfully.

"How do you do, Mr. Harlan." He smiled his best, though evidently wondering what the blazes the banker was doing there.

John was taken rather by surprise.

"How did you know me?" he asked, rather pleased.

"I guess any wide-awake newspaper reporter would recognize John Harlan by sight—and I used to be a reporter before I went into publicity work. Were you looking for anyone in particular, Mr. Harlan?"

John hesitated. He felt a little embarrassed—much as he had when a callow Lawrenceville boy, he dropped back-stage for his first chorus girl. There was no need, he thought, of telling this press agent *all* his business. Perhaps Peggy wasn't around.

"I thought I'd like to see some movie-making from the inside," he explained. "This studio was the handiest."

The press agent scented publicity possibilities. "We're shooting some 'interiors' out on the studio floor," he suggested. "I'd be glad to show you around."

John nodded, and the p. a. led the way through a pine door at the back of the room.

The studio interior was a broad expanse of wooden floor, bare except for one "set" in a far corner. Things seemed to be quite lively over there. Electricians were jerking around banks

of Klieg lights mounted on wheels. A girl in the smeary yellow make-up of the movies and wearing a daringly cut pink bathing-suit passed and smiled at John.

The press agent asked his visitor to wait a moment in the middle of the floor. John didn't mind; he was boyishly interested, though a line of Kliegs barricaded the "set" off from the rest of the studio.

The publicity man came up briskly with a tall, stoop-shouldered man in puttees. He was swarthy and had a mustache like that of the villain in a Bill Hart shootin' film.

"Mr. Harlan, this is Mr. Siegel, our director and Western manager for Hal Harris Productions," introduced the p. a.

"Honored to think a big man like you would visit our little studio," drawled Siegel bootlickingly, regarding John with a jaundiced and rather shifty eye. "Like to watch us work a little?"

They escorted their visitor across the studio floor and through the Klieg stockade. The "set," which was built to represent the lobby of a summer hotel, was bathed in a strong white light. John walked over a soft carpet. A cushioned divan occupied the center of the lobby, and there were soft cushions on the carpet around it.

Draped at ease upon the cushions was a group of pretty girls clad uniformly in rather startling pink single-piece bathing-suits. They eyed the visitor with mild curiosity.

Suddenly one of the girls sprang up from a cushion and hurried over to John. He recognized the lithe form of Peggy.

"Oh, you decided to come after all, Jack," she approved. "That's fine—you always were a game sport."

Siegel frowned, and the p. a. opened understanding eyes. Peggy calmly appropriated Harlan, ignoring them both,

and prepared to cast a little bomb among her fellow mermaids.

"Well, girls," she announced grandly, "this is my friend, the famous Wall Street banker, Jack Harlan, whom you have heard me mention before."

John wished that she would be a little more tactful. But he found himself shaking hands with more names than he could possibly remember. A little sea of creamy legs, trim hips and pink toes seemed to be churning around him. They must wiggle into their costumes with shoe-horns, he thought. The old, familiar smell of grease-paint was in his decorous nostrils; back in the merry-merry world of make-believe; home and Harlan & Co. three thousand miles away.

He tossed back his head and laughed like a boy at one of Peggy's sallies. "I bet he's a good scout," he heard one girl whisper. He liked that, and accepted Peggy's invitation to a seat on the divan.

Peggy slid down beside him. The other girls grouped around them.

"Too bad you didn't bring your bathing-suit, Jack," laughed Peggy. "They're going to cut loose the water power in a little while and wash us out of the lobby—Siegel thinks that'll make a nifty scene." The other girls chimed in with rollicking comments. John's boyish laughter was infectious.

"Why didn't you ever become a movie actor, Jack?" joshed Peggy. "Gosh, you've got Wally Reid skinned a mile for looks."

"You said it, Peggy," the dignified Mr. Harlan retorted. "The producers don't know what there missing when they pass me up."

At that instant something flashed into the brain of the press agent standing interestedly near, and he drew Siegel excitedly to one side.

A moment later the drawly voice of the director came to John's ear, "You wouldn't mind us taking a little pic-

ture of you, would you, Mr. Harlan?"

John calmed down a bit, and a little of his usual reserve asserted itself. "I was just joking, of course. I really must be go—"

"Oh, come on, Jack—let 'em shoot a still. Show us you're a second Rodolph Valentino," urged Peggy.

The other girls boisterously agreed.

Jack looked from one gay feminine face to the other. "Well," he admitted, "I suppose it will be all right."

But he really hadn't weighed the propriety of it in his mind for a second, and in his present exhilarated mood nothing, no matter how rash, would have feazed him. He had slipped, for the time being, from the proper John Harlan Margery knew into the wild Jack Harlan who used to wait at the New Amsterdam stage-door for Peggy.

Siegel spoke to the cameraman. The bathing beauties pressed more closely around John, and he smiled into the dancing eyes of pretty Peggy.

At a word from Siegel, the cameraman turned the crank a few times, and the intimate tableau was recorded on celluloid.

A few minutes later John took his leave of Peggy and her companions and jumped into the hired roadster at the curb. During the ride back to Los Angeles the foam was slightly blown off, and John wondered vaguely if he had been dangerously indiscreet. He was quite sure that Margery, if she knew of his adventure, would be wild.

CHAPTER VII

THE tinkle of John's room telephone woke him at eight-thirty the next morning. The message that came over the wire in the excited voice of Peggy brought him down into the lobby of the Envoy with the speed of a fire chief bound to a blaze in an orphan asylum.

Peggy pushed him to a corner settee. "I have a ten o'clock call at the

studio," she warned, her pixie face unnaturally grave, "so you'll have to get this quick. Part of it is my fault—I shouldn't have invited you out to the studio, and it was up to me to warn you that this company I'm working for is kind of a shyster, fly-by-night outfit. Siegel, for instance, I wouldn't trust as far as I could see him. He's N.G.

"Well, after we finished work last night, I happened to walk through the outer office, and I heard Siegel and the press agent laughing over something. Your name was mentioned, so I lingered around and listened in. Gosh, this is sure a tough thing to spring on a man's empty stomach—but, Jack, those highbinders are planning to work that shot of you and me and the girls into the picture we're just finishing. The fillum is called 'The Gay Millionaire'—so you come in fine.

"Siegel and the p.a. think it's a great stunt—a bathing-girl comedy with a well-known guy like you in the cast. You got to hand it to 'em—it *is*. 'Course they don't dare advertise your name, but they can noise it around privately, and, after one person has seen the picture, the news'll spread—don't worry about that. You'll be packing 'em in all over the country." Peggy even permitted herself a smile. "It was a nice little family group, wasn't it?—all us girls in our cute little bathing-suits. I hope you haven't a jealous wife, Jack."

"Jealous!" he exclaimed through set teeth—he had been thinking of Margery. "Peggy—it's awful!"

His brain was whirling like a ferris-wheel. The damnable luck of it!—one little skid off the straight and narrow—an innocent one at that—and here was a misrepresenting, compromising picture threatening to tell the whole world, including Margery, about it.

Margery—dear, suspicious Margery—would be horrified—worse. Likely she would wish to divorce him. Farra-

day would be shocked and angry. All Wall Street would believe he had slipped back into the wild, irresponsible ways again. Confidence in him would be irretrievably shaken. Terrible!

He was thoroughly aroused, and he snapped to Peggy, "What's this man Siegel's game—blackmail?"

"Perhaps," said Peggy. "Better come back with me to Hollywood and see—after you have your breakfast."

"Don't want any breakfast—come on!"

Seizing his hat and her arm in nearly a single motion, he dashed out of the hotel with her and across the curb to a free-lancing taxi. He shouted directions to the driver and plied him freely with lucre to insure the maximum of speed.

In twenty minutes the boiling machine jerked to a stop in front of the Hal Harris studio, in Hollywood. John threw some more silver dollars at the driver, and he and Peggy hustled through the studio gate and up to the door marked "Office." This Harlan unceremoniously yanked open, neglecting to knock. The young cyclone rather took by surprise Siegel and the press agent, who were conferring near the latter's desk.

"Ah, good morning, Mr. Ha—" This from the drawling Siegel, with an attempt at business-as-usual.

"What have you done with that picture that you took of me yesterday?" John hurled at him, tossing diplomacy to the dogs.

The smile of the snug Siegel vanished, and the publicity man looked a little frightened at their visitor's vehemence.

"Won't you have a ch—" Another attempt by Siegel.

"I've no time to sit down. Where's the picture?"

"Why, Mr. Harlan," Siegel drawled, with an attempt at sly conciliation, "I thought you understood that the picture

was to become our property. If you'll remember, you gave us permission to take it—I have witnesses."

"I know—but I didn't think it was going to be part of a movie. I understood it was just a—er—private picture. You got it under false pretenses."

"You made no restrictions about its use," Siegel persisted. "You were talking about being an actor—I only took you at your word."

John saw that he was dealing with a fox and that there was no use wasting fancy language. He was not sure about the law in the case. But he was sure that he didn't want lawyers and their little playmates, the newspapers, mixed up in it. Once let it get to the ears of Margery—!

He turned abruptly to Siegel. "How much do you want for the picture?"

"Why—I don't get you," bluffed the director.

John's short laugh was derisively mirthless. "Yes, you do—how much money to turn over the picture to me and forget it?"

The director, sitting on the edge of the desk and nursing a bony knee in his clasped hands, was exasperatingly slow.

"Well, Mr. Harlan—believe me or not—if you was to offer me a million dollars, I couldn't be bribed. Every Tuesday night we ship the film we've shot during the week to Mr. Harris' office in New York. He sends what he wants to the laboratory to be developed. It's cheaper that way." Siegel shrugged his narrow shoulders. "Well, yesterday was Tuesday. I expressed your picture, with the rest of the film, to New York."

"Yes—and you and that smart press agent doped out a night-letter to Harris telling him how the fillum was worth a million dollars with Mr. Harlan in it—I heard you," Peggy interrupted, scorn and anger in her voice and eyes. "You're a fine hunch of bum sports—you ought to be in San Quentin."

She caught at Harlan's arm. "Come on, Jack. You can't get any satisfaction out of this slick fish. The only true word he said was that he ships fillum to New York on Tuesdays."

She urged the undecided John toward the door, turning to Siegel long enough to announce haughtily: "You can tear that ten o'clock call of mine up—I'm through with wearing tights for four-flushers like you."

A visibly distracted John and Peggy piled into the waiting taxi and sped back toward Los Angeles.

"Now, don't worry, Jack," encouraged Peggy on the way. "You just hustle back to New York quick as you can and see Harris—he has an office on Seventh Avenue. Bluff him a little and then if the old crab don't come through—flash a fat bundle of bills in his face—and you'll get your début in the movies back fast enough."

"I hope to God you're right, Peggy," wailed John from the depths of the seat into which he had slumped moodily.

As they reached the residential outskirts of Los Angeles, he suddenly remembered that, after all, he had come to California on business. He pulled out his watch and saw that it was eleven o'clock.

"I'll have to go to the meeting—I can just make it," he said. "Maybe the damned business will be finished this afternoon, and I'll be able to start right back East."

"Too bad that Los Angeles-New York aeroplane line hasn't started yet," sighed Peggy encouragingly.

CHAPTER VIII

For the time being John's tide of ill-fortune changed. The arrival of the San Francisco banker, armed with authority, papers, and a hearty dislike for Los Angeles, caused the business to be concluded about five in the afternoon and the new officers of the Pacific Fruit Company duly installed.

At eight Harlan, worried and impatient, boarded a transcontinental Pullman for the East.

By the second day he had concluded that the trip would last forever. He perspired and swore freely, ate very little, and slept hardly at all. He snapped at genial trainmates who, recognizing the famous John Harlan, tried respectfully to pick an acquaintance. He glared at flappers who openly admired his good looks from behind magazines. He quarreled with all the waiters and made a lifelong enemy of a prominent Chicago banker who had been attending the Pacific Fruit reorganization; eight times John refused the latter's invitation to be the fourth man at bridge.

Margery was waiting just outside the grilled gate at the Pennsylvania Station when the train slid in at eleven in the evening. Faithful Margery. John felt like a criminal as he forced a sickly grin into his face at the sight of her and hurried up, followed by a sleepy red-cap with his bags.

Margery looked as fresh and pretty as a daisy—light-blue sport suit, white socks, and sandals—cool as a Clover Club amid the perspiring station throng—every strand of her velvety blonde hair in place. Gad! fancy losing such a woman as that, thought John. Worth a thousand Peggys. What a dumb-bell he had been. He kissed her.

"Why, has anything been the matter with you, John?" Margery asked at once, looking into his flushed face closely. "Have you been ill? You didn't write me about it."

John laughed—a rather poorly done laugh. "Why, I've been fit as a fiddle," he lied. "You look great." He meant that. "Let's get home as quickly as we can."

That was about the extent of his garrulousness for the night. All the way across the ferry in the limousine and through light-dotted Jersey City

and Newark and over the open country to Long Hills he sat morosely and answered her eager questions with monosyllabic grunts.

Several times she looked at him curiously, and in the semi-dark her face began to take on a worried look also.

"There's something wrong with you, John," she declared bluntly, when they were preparing for bed. She put her two white hands upon his shoulders and looked intently into his face, which he was trying vainly to camouflage.

"No, there's not, dear," he protested—too vehemently. "I'm fine—but tired."

At ten o'clock the next morning he visited the New York office of Hal Harris Productions, intending to get quick action. Margery had started asking solicitous questions again at breakfast; he must look more suspicious than ever by daylight. She had even made a semi-joking remark about the movies:

"You didn't meet a movie star in Los Angeles that you liked better than your wife, did you, John?" And she had watched him closely for the answer. That was bad.

When a tough little office-boy admitted him into Hal Harris' presence, Harlan found himself facing a flashily dressed, stoutish man with a prominent nose and a voice several shades too loud. He pulled a greasy black cigar from his mouth long enough to ask John to sit down. He had evidently recognized the banker at sight, for he spoke his name.

"I guess you know why I'm here," Harlan began abruptly.

Harris shrugged his fat shoulders. "I don't know, Mr. Harlan—maybe you want to buy my company—your father bought my other company—he waited until I was nearly broke and bought me out and then kicked me out

—that was a fine way to treat me, wasn't it?"

The semi-malicious light in Hal Harris' eye did not augur well. John learned where Harlan & Co. had acquired one of their motion picture interests.

The banker pulled himself together as well as the past hectic week would allow him.

"Maybe I *would* consider buying you out—a little share in your company anyway—the picture business is a very poor just now—probably you could use a little money."

Harris laughed ominously. "Not a nickel."

John cleared his parched throat. "All right. Now that we've settled that, Mr. Harris, how much do you want for that picture Siegel inveigled out of me in Hollywood? Or would you rather I turned the matter over to my lawyers?"

"Mr. Harlan," the movie man said slowly, "I'll admit I know what you're talking about. I want you to see this situation from my standpoint as well as your own: You are one of the best known millionaires in this country. People say that you had a—er—rather interesting past. At one time, I believe, you were rumored to be engaged to a *Follies* girl named Peggy Du Bois. My directo: wires me that he has a moving picture showing this same Miss Du Bois and you and some others. Well, what am I going to do? The picture's worth—"

"How much?" cut in John. It was a fearfully hot day, and he was perspiring like a stoker.

Harris pulled himself ponderously out of the chair. "Mr. Harlan," he said, "your father put me out of business once, and I don't owe you any favors. I wouldn't sell you that picture for all Harlan & Co. owns. And that's final!"

John threatened, cajoled, and offered to bribe for a few moments longer, but he saw that further argument was futile. Finally he walked slowly to his car and was driven downtown.

He thought of consulting a lawyer but became panic-stricken as he imagined the publicity attending a lawsuit.

During the next week John approximated the mental tortures of a prisoner in the Death House at Sing Sing and a bridegroom facing the wedding ceremony combined. He had the heart for very little work. Farraday inquired anxiously what was the matter. His secretary regarded him curiously as he dictated in faltering accents and almost chewed his pencil in two.

He went to see Harris again—twice—but the producer was obdurate.

And Margery—Margery kept asking questions. Had something dreadful happened in California that he was hiding from her? Her eyes were always upon him.

He took to reading the moving picture columns in the newspapers, thinking perhaps there would be a hint as to when things were going to pop. One morning he gasped as, going in on the train, his eye caught this item:

NEW HAL HARRIS SENSATION

Hal Horris, the comedy man, is said to be preparing a picture for release that will be an absolute sensation. It is called "The Gay Millionaire," and one of the best-known millionaires in America, it is rumored, makes his cinema debut in the comedy, together with Peggy Du Bois and the other famous Horris bathing beauties.

John took off his hat to cool his swimming head. The dike was about to burst. When he reached his office,

he thought rather irrationally of flight and instructed his secretary to call up a number of European steamship companies about sailings.

Speeding across the Jersey meadows that evening in the homebound train, he caught sight of a newly pasted billboard. In shouting letters it read:

Hal Harris' Latest and Best
"THE GAY MILLIONAIRE"
The Comedy Knockout of the Year
With
(The Best-Known Millionaire in
America)
and
The Famous Harris Bathing Girls
IT'S A RIOT!

John agreed grimly with the last line.

When he reached home, Margery took one penetrating look at him and wanted to telephone at once for the doctor.

"You simply must tell me what's the trouble with you, John," she declared. "Is there so-some other woman?"

Her blue eyes were half-filled with tears. John stalled her off desperately all evening, swearing eternal and exclusive love and devotion every few minutes, and stole away the next morning for New York without awaking her.

The end, he felt, was very near.

CHAPTER IX

JOHN HARLAN sat slumped in his chair gazing dejectedly over the tops of the lesser skyscrapers into the busy traffic of the North River. He did not hear his secretary's voice until she came very close to him and said distinctly for the third time, "Mr. Harris on the wire, sir."

John only half caught the name as he lifted the receiver off the hook.

"Mr. Harlan," came Harris' husky

voice, strangely pleasant, "if you'll drop up here right away, there's a chance we can do something about that picture business."

Fairly flinging the receiver back in its place, John was out of the office like a whirlwind. He hailed a taxi and fidgeted madly on the seat until he reached his destination.

The waiting Harris looked like a corpulent Sphinx.

"Have a seat, Mr. Harlan," he invited. John, who had recovered his equilibrium partially, obeyed. "Well," announced Harris, "I've changed my mind—I'll sell you the picture and name you a liberal price—twenty thousand dollars."

John winced. The figure was steep, but he dared not think twice about it. He swallowed hard, took his check-book from his pocket, and scribbled for a moment. He held the check out toward Harris and demanded cautiously, "Where's the film?"

The producer reached under his desk and brought up a circular tin.

"You won't have to open it here," he grinned. "I've written out a receipt, and I'll guarantee that this film contains the negative of your picture—and the only one there is."

Without waiting to verify this, John turned over the money and, clutching his precious can of film close to him, was whisked in an elevator to the ground floor. In the taxi he sighed. He already felt like a new man. When he reached the Harlan building, he handed the driver a crisp twenty-dollar bill and his best smile.

Amos Farraday looked up from his desk as his junior partner hurried by. Why, John was actually whistling! Farraday was greatly relieved.

John gaily dismissed his secretary for the day, though her desk was piled high with work. When he was alone, he regarded the can of film on his desk

quizzically. Curiosity began to take possession of him. He chuckled like a youngster with a new electric train. He wondered what he looked like in celluloid. No harm in seeing; he could burn the film in a few seconds.

So, after a cautious and unnecessary look around, he opened the tin and pulled out the rolled celluloid, holding an end of it up to the sunlight that came streaming in through the window. An exclamation of surprise escaped him. Why, the film was as black as ink; he couldn't distinguish a thing.

Deciding that the trouble was that he didn't know how to look at the thing, on an impulse he rang for a boy.

"Ask Mr. Hurlburt to step in," he instructed the youngster. Young Hurlburt was the member of Harlan & Co. who had charge of their moving picture financing branch and was alleged to know everything about the movies.

"Er—close the door please, Hurlburt," began John. Hurlburt did so. "I'm thinking of buying one of those little moving picture projection machines," prevaricated John. "I've already gotten hold of this film. But it doesn't seem to be any good. I thought perhaps you could tell me what's the matter with it."

He handed the strip of film over for Hurlburt's inspection. The latter walked to the window and held the film up to the light, as John had done. After a moment of squinting, he turned around.

"Somebody has deceived you, Harlan," he said. "This film has been spoiled. It's undeveloped negative that's been exposed to the light, and is no good whatever. Where did you get it?"

"Oh, some—er—thanks, old man."

John made sure to take back his film. "I'll get after the chap I bought it from."

When Hurlburt was out of the door, John called Harris.

"You lied to me about this film," he began heatedly. "It's black—no good. How do I know whether I'm in it or not? I'll stop payment on that—"

"Don't get excited, Mr. Harlan," he heard Harris' mocking voice. "I know it's spoiled—that's the way you wanted it, ain't it? It saves you trouble. If you want to know how it happened: The negative came in the office from our studio undeveloped. My damned careless office-boy opened the can while I was out, and the sun got to it and ruined the whole picture—after we had the publicity and advertising started—and everything. But look here, Mr. Wild Jack Harlan, you're pretty damned lucky to get off so easy—because I don't mind telling you that if it wasn't for that office-boy, who has since been fired, I never would have sold you a foot of film for love nor money."

And John, when he had replaced the receiver, agreed that he was lucky. He smiled and called up a ticket speculator, contracting cheerfully to pay twenty-five dollars for two seats to the most expensive show in town. Having the call switched to the Hotel Biltmore, he ordered a private dining-room for that evening. Then he got Margery on the wire.

John Harlan intended to celebrate fittingly his return to the straight and narrow—for life.

"A movie studio," observed John to himself, when everything had been perfectly arranged, "is no place for husbands."

The Flapper Fools Them

By Philip Somers



Those who sat nearby on the roof of the Hotel Belleford, the girl in the mouse-gray frock seemed a smart little flapper. Her suede pumps barely touched the tiled floor, and the expanse of silken sheeriness beneath the table revealed legs that were slim and shapely. Her saucy head was ringed with bobbed brown hair and her eyebrows were finely penciled.

The man opposite was a totally different type. His complexion was as swarthy as the girl's was pale, and his hands were as heavy and pudgy as hers were delicate. Each puffed at a cigarette in a long holder, and they both had sampled the contents of a silver pocket-flask.

The girl was idly blowing smoke from her red lips and listening to what her companion was saying in a low, guarded tone.

"Of course, I hadn't figured on finding you here," he said, "but it's certainly good to see you. The going must have been good—to judge from the class of your costume—and the fact that you've rooms in a house like this."

She smiled and shrugged her slim shoulders.

"The going was good," she confessed, "before Bill was blown up by a bomb while trying to lift that necklace from the yegg who stole it."

Her expression hardened and a cruel look came into her deep brown eyes. She had never forgotten the pang of Bill's death. And despite the lenient

sentence she had been given because she had informed on the fellow crook who contrived to kill him, Madge the Mouse was still an outlaw at heart.

"So Bill's dead!" the man said. "Too bad—but he was foolish. This rough stuff never pays in the end. My methods are different. I've lived like a lord in Rio and in Havana—fleece 'em in Shanghai and frisked 'em in Paris—and always in such a smooth way that there wasn't a chance to be caught."

Madge the Mouse smiled bitterly. "They gave me a year and a half," she said, "in spite of the fact that I squealed on the fellow who finished Bill. That was all the thanks I got from the cops. And I haven't any desire to go to the pen again. Besides, Bill left me fairly well fixed, and it hasn't been necessary to try any crooked work since I got out of jail."

"Never again, I suppose!" he chuckled teasingly. "That's what they all say; but a true crook never reforms. It's the excitement I guess. We always want it—worse than dope or hooch."

"I tell you I'm off the crime stuff!" she insisted, with a negative shake of her head. "Some day I may decide to steal a millionaire's heart—but I'll only dip into his purse by means of matrimony—"

"Or alimony?" suggested her companion. "Now, see here, Madge—we were always good friends. I always fancied Bill, too, and I'd like to do you a good turn—"

"And give me a chance to do another turn up the river?" she suggested contemptuously.

"Nonsense!" he protested. "I've a little proposition to make that ought to sound good to you."

"They all sound good—till you're caught!" Madge observed with quiet sophistication.

"Oh, come!" he protested. "I'm registered here as J. Buckleigh Hunt, and I've the coin to finance whatever I choose. If you're going down to Atlantic for a vacation, what do you say to a little small change to help out with expenses?"

"Just how much is small change?" Madge inquired with a show of interest, and a twinkle in her eyes.

Mr. Hunt's fat neck shook with silent laughter as he whispered, "Shall we say about five thousand?"

"Easy go—but how easy get?" she parried suspiciously.

"Simplest thing in the world," Mr. Hunt assured her. "With your scenery and upstage manner, you can pull the stunt like a breeze. I furnish full information and pay all expenses."

"But suppose something goes wrong?" she reminded him. "I don't care for another rest in the reformatory."

"Don't be absurd!" he snapped impatiently. "My plans are always so plain and simple that nothing can possibly happen. You won't even have to deal with the fences. I'll pay you your share—c.o.d.—right here in the hotel."

"Tell Baby Bright-eyes all about it, nice man!" Madge smiled at him, and Hunt chuckled inwardly as he saw that he had won. In fact, he felt himself in luck to have found Madge the Mouse. He had known her of old—and her dead husband, too—and he was well aware that she was one of the slickest female rogues who ever used a rouge stick and disarmed suspicion completely with her innocent air.

HALF an hour later a trim little figure in gray alighted from a limousine in front of an exclusive shop in Chestnut street. A liveried footman opened the door and Madge the Mouse sprang out with a juvenile air of eager anticipation.

Several mere men, in passing by, paused to stare after her; and Madge was conscious of envious looks from a number of females whose fascination was far less great than her own. Inside the jeweler's she looked about until her eyes met those of a good-looking young male, and a moment later he was conducting her toward the rear of the store.

"I really haven't much time," she said with a shade of regret in her voice, "but we're going away today, so I'm afraid I'll have to hurry."

Her escort bowed and seemed to regret that his charming customer must depart so soon. He would have liked to show her the entire stock of treasures the many cases contained. Madge was aware of her conquest and turned upon him a pair of eyes that had laughing mischief dancing in their depths.

"You see," she confided, leaning close to the salesman, "it was only this morning I persuaded Dad that I simply must have a new diamond bar-pin. If I don't buy it right away, he's sure to change his mind—so show me the prettiest ones you have—and not *too expensive*, please."

"About how much would you care to pay?" came the courteous question, and the salesman held his breath while waiting for her answer. It almost stunned him when it came—not because of the amount—but because of the thought of this flapper flipping away such a sum with apparent carelessness.

"Oh, not over ten thousand," she said with a gesture that was almost apologetic.

The salesman bowed and begged her

to be seated. Then he hurried away to the vaults in the rear of the place, and Madge sat on the chair staring with a bored expression at the tips of her tiny shoes. The young man returned and displayed a bewildering number of bar-pins, each more alluring than the other. Yet, despite their sparkling brilliance and really rare designs, Madge did not seem to be impressed by them.

"This one, at eight thousand, is a beauty," the salesman enthused. "It was done in our own studios and the stones are flawless—"

"It really doesn't look like much," Madge shook her head. "Now *that* one isn't bad—in fact it's rather different."

The salesman placed upon a velvet cushion the pin she indicated, and nodded when he realized she knew something worth while when she saw it. The stones were even finer than in the pin he had suggested—and the mounting was exceedingly novel. Besides, it cost a thousand dollars more.

"I think I'll take that," Madge announced, consulting her wrist-watch with sudden recollection of her haste. "I'll just pin it on and be running—"

She stopped abruptly, as though puzzled at the change in the expression on the young man's face. Then she burst out laughing, and put one little hand on the sleeve of his cutaway coat, as though to reassure him. "You didn't think I wanted to charge it, or have you send the bill to papa?" she pealed merrily. "Of course, you don't know me—"

The salesman nodded his head, in perfect understanding, and regretted that what she said was the case.

"Of course I did not think—" he began awkwardly, but her eyes silenced him.

"Of course you *did* think!" she contradicted. "That's what you receive a salary for—isn't it? Well, don't worry, I'll pay for it."

Then she turned away from him, and, bending down, felt beneath her abbreviated skirt for a moment. The salesman looked discreetly away, but did not neglect in that moment to keep one eye on the bar-pin Madge had chosen.

But now her glance met his again, and a slight flush came over his features as she counted out on the table-top nine one-thousand-dollar bills. There was just one remaining in her dainty fingers, and she held it up to him with a look of girlish triumph in her eyes.

"Don't you dare breathe a word that I didn't spend it all," she pleaded. "If Dad knew I had this one left he'd want it back again. He lets me buy whatever I want, but he's as stingy as can be with spending money."

The clerk gasped as he took the bills; and then a perplexed look came over his face. Madge was watching him closely and he did not wish to make the slightest false move—yet he was not in the habit of selling such costly jewelry to unknown customers who paid cash for it.

"If you'll wait just a moment—please," he requested politely. "I shall have to report the sale to the cashier and show the pin at the office before I can let you take it."

"You mean that you're not sure about the money?" Madge sniffed contemptuously. Then, with a seeming effort, she controlled her impatience and asked the man to make haste.

He did—to the best of his ability—but as he had foreseen, the cashier wished to have the bank next door pass upon the genuineness of those bills. A messenger was dispatched for that purpose and the salesman loitered in the vicinity of the cashier's cage until the report should come back. He had put away the other trays and the pin Madge had purchased was safe in his hand.

His only anxiety was lest he might offend the girl, and as the messenger did not come back when five minutes had ticked away, the salesman was growing more and more uneasy.

He did not want to affront such a desirable patron. Nine-thousand-dollar sales did not occur every day, and never in all his life had he been privileged to wait on so dainty a miss.

Then the bank boy returned and nodded his head. The money was quite all right. So the salesman hurried to Madge to inform her of the fact and deliver to her the pin.

But, to his chagrin, he found a most angry young lady pacing back and forth in a furious flapper flutter. As he reached her side, she glanced again at her wrist-watch, and then into his face, with a look of utter scorn.

"I've changed my mind," she said with a haughty air. "Keep your old pin and give me my money back."

The clerk's knees almost gave way beneath him. The manager was watching and saw that something was wrong. So the salesman knew he would be in for a reprimand if he permitted the girl to go without making a purchase.

"Really," he began, "I'm very sorry—"

"You ought to be!" Madge hurled at him with the tears coming into her eyes. "I've never been so mortified in all my life. The idea of keeping me standing here while you go to find out if my own father's money's good. He'd come down here and give your old boss a good talking to if I let him know that!"

"But you will appreciate—" the flustered salesman floundered in confusion, wondering who on earth he had insulted so clumsily.

"I'll appreciate your returning my money at once!" she snapped, and turned her back on him.

There was nothing else to do, so the

salesman went back to the cashier's cage after the nine thousand dollars. The manager, sensing that there must be a misunderstanding, approached him, and a brief colloquy followed. Meanwhile, Madge was growing madder, and as the manager turned, he saw the little fury coming toward them.

Diplomat that he was, he took the matter in hand, and with a bow presented the girl with the roll of bills. She accepted them with an angry sniff, and thrust them into her handbag, fumbling around inside for a dainty lace handkerchief, with which she dabbed at her moist eyes.

"We are, of course, grieved that the pin is not satisfactory," the manager began.

"The pin is perfectly satisfactory!" she bit out the words. "It's that *pin-head* boy who waited on me!"

The salesman felt his heart sink, and his eyes stared at her like those of a pet dog who has been unjustly whipped by its mistress.

"Really, ah, Miss—" he stammered, and the manager frowned at him severely.

But the apparent misery of the youth seemed to soften Madge. "I suppose I'm a silly little goose!" she accused herself, "and I wouldn't for the world want to get you into trouble. If the sale *means* anything to you, I'll take the darned old thing. Only, hurry, please," she added, with a glance at the clock.

At a nod from the manager, the salesman presented the pin. He did not wish the girl to change her mind again. She took it carelessly in her hand, holding it in one palm while she reached again into her bag for the nine thousand dollars.

"Do you want to count it or take it down to the mint or wherever Dad gets it from?" she shot at them with an imperious stamp of her foot. "Because I

haven't all day to fool around your old store!"

The manager accepted from her the handful of crumpled bills, and without seeming to do so, made sure nine were there. He also ascertained something else so swiftly and unobtrusively that even the salesman did not observe what he did. Yet he satisfied himself of a blue pencil mark on the face of the top-most bill.

"Nothing further will be necessary," he said courteously to Madge. "I trust the pin will be entirely satisfactory—otherwise we will be glad to have you return it."

"Poof!" sniffed Madge. "If I get tired of it, I'll give it to my maid."

Then the liveried attendant opened the door, and the clerk and the manager bowed and stared as the girl crossed the sidewalk and entered her limousine.

III

As the jeweler's footman was about to close the door, Madge signaled him to wait. "Do call to the gentleman over there!" she said smilingly, and pointed to a swarthy, heavy-set person strolling down the street.

The chauffeur waited her orders, and the footman darted away, to return in a moment, followed by Madge's friend.

"Oh, Mr. Hunt!" she exclaimed, extending her hand. "How wonderful to see you so unexpectedly. Do let me give you a lift! Dad will be delighted to know you're in town."

Mr. Hunt seemed charmed, and stepped into the car, seating himself heavily at the side of the girl. "Tell him to drive to the Hotel Belleford," Madge directed the footman, and, touching his hat, the flunkie closed the door.

"Well?" asked Mr. Hunt guardedly, as the car moved slowly down Chestnut street through the traffic.

"It went all right," Madge told him, "but I'm shaking like a leaf. As you figured they would, they sent the money to the bank to find out if it was good. The time it took the man to get back seemed longer than the stretch I spent in jail."

"Sh!" warned Mr. Hunt. "Maybe the chauffeur can hear. This car isn't mine, of course—only hired—so I can't be sure of him."

"Say," said Madge nervously, as the limousine turned the next corner and headed south, "I don't like this business a little bit. Once sentenced, twice shy, I guess." She tried to laugh, but the effort was not successful.

"Don't be silly!" objected her companion. "You've done it beautifully—just as I knew you would."

"No, I haven't either—and I'm afraid you're going to be dreadfully angry," she confessed contritely.

"What's wrong?" Hunt demanded with a snarl in his voice, and a suspicious look in his shifty eyes.

"I had to sacrifice one of the genuine bills," she explained, and Hunt gave a smothered exclamation of anger.

"I thought of the possibility when I was waiting for them to give me back the money," she told him. "And when they handed it to me, just as I thought might happen, there was a teller's big blue-pencil mark across the face of the bill on top. Maybe it was a trap, and maybe not—but I wasn't taking chances—"

"I don't get you," he said with a frown.

"Then you're stupid," she snapped. "I slipped one bill out of the phony pile, and handed him nine counterfeits with *the marked good one* on top. Just so he wouldn't look at the others, I crumpled them up in a wad—and it was a good thing I did. I caught old skeezicks looking for that pencil mark."

"Damn!" said Mr. Hunt sincerely.

"That thousand comes out of *your* share, old dear."

Madge shot him a look of contempt. "I didn't think you'd be as cheap as that!" she sneered. "But I always said that Bill was the only real gentleman crook—"

"Cut it!" growled Hunt. "That chauffeur may get on."

"Well, let him!" snapped Madge. "I'm through with you—my cheap-skate friend! Here—take the pin before the bulls grab the car and pinch us both!"

She tore the diamond bar from the front of her frock and hurled it into his lap. Hunt was furious, but he caught it before it fell to the floor and with quick, appraising eyes satisfied himself that it was of sufficient value. In fact, his anger softened a little as he caught the glint of the perfect stones.

"Now, see here, Madge"—he tried to conciliate her, as he slipped the jewel into his waistcoat pocket.

"I'm *through* with you!" she repeated, "and you needn't waste your breath. Since you're a piker, I'll not argue with you. I get four thousand bucks—"

"That's only fair, Madge—it was your fault—" he whined.

"Oh, I might have known it!" she shot back at him, and peeled four bills from the roll in her hand. "There! Take the rest of your coin—you four-flusher! You want me to run all the risk and then you welch on your own proposition." The money hit him in the chest.

She had already reached out for the handle of the door. Then, as the car slowed down at Thirteenth street at a traffic policeman's signal, she threw it open, and stepped out on the running-board.

"Ah, say, Madge!" he said with a sudden sense of uneasiness. "Don't act like that! Let's chin it over—" But

she shook herself frantically from his grasp.

"Don't you ever *dare* speak to me again!" she cried aloud, her eyes flaming as she sprang to the street and ran to the curb. Passersby stared at her in amazement, and gazed toward the limousine, to see Mr. Hunt's choleric face peering from the open door. He shook his fist at her and then paused abruptly, as his eye discerned a policeman walking toward Madge.

He slammed the door furiously and took up the speaking-tube with a shaking hand. But to Hunt's surprise, Madge turned to the policeman with a confident smile beaming through her sudden tears. He began to wonder whether, after all, Madge *had* turned honest and was going to spill the beans. She could *do* it, too, with the pin in his possession.

But Madge only put one little hand on the bluecoat's arm and shook her head in answer to his inquiry.

"Oh, no—*please!*" she begged, almost piteously. "I really shouldn't have consented to ride with him—and Mother would be just furious if she ever knew!"

"I'll run him in, if you say so," the officer offered; "or punch his damn head!" he added as he looked down admiringly at the frail, trembling creature who clung to him so trustingly.

"Oh, you mustn't—*really!*" she insisted, looking up at the traffic-man with an expression of anguish in her eyes. "You wouldn't want me to be scolded, would you?"

"Of course not," the officer said, with an angry glare in the direction of Hunt, cowering in his limousine. Then he signaled for the traffic to proceed. "I'd like to blackjack one o' them old birds for getting gay with a little kid like you!"

"Oh, don't make a scene—people are staring so!" she whispered and hung

her head. "Do get me a taxicab—there's a dear."

The officer did, and gallantly helped her in. She gave him a winning little smile, and, reaching into her purse, pulled out a five-dollar bill. "Do take this—just as a small token of my gratitude," she insisted. "You've been so very kind."

Then the cab sped up Thirteenth Street and the officer sauntered away with the thought that he would rather have kissed those pouting lips than have the five-spot which nestled in his pocket.

"You can't blame them old guys, after all!" he observed to himself. "Why wasn't I born rich instead of good-lookin'?"

IV

MADGE THE MOUSE watched her dainty step as she paid the chauffeur, and hurried into Broad Street station. The checks for her bags were already in her purse—having been sent from the hotel that morning—but she paused at the ticket window to purchase a Pullman seat for Atlantic City. She meant to take the train that left in twenty minutes—although she had changed her mind about going down to the shore. However, she wished to be away from Philadelphia as quickly as possible—and it was just as well to be seen taking the ocean-bound train.

Then, looking carefully around to make sure she was not followed, she went into a telephone booth and called up the Hotel Belleford. For several minutes she spoke over the wire, and then hurried upstairs to the train floor, just in time to avoid the attendant's shutting the gate in her face.

A porter had checked her luggage through to New York, so Madge was not encumbered with any burden save her beaded purse. Covertly, she peered inside and satisfied herself that

its contents were intact. Then she sat demurely in her seat until the train slowed down at the North Philadelphia station.

As the car came to a stop, Madge walked with a careless air toward the vestibule, and while passengers were getting on, she stepped off. A quick dart into the waiting-room, and she was out of sight. An interval of another five minutes, and the girl was again in a Pullman seat—this time bound for New York.

She gave a little sigh of satisfaction as she took off her saucy toque and handed it to the porter to put in the rack overhead. It *had* been fun to take another fling at the game she thought she had quit—but the best fun of all was beating a clever crook at the game *he* had devised. By this time, she thought, the house detective at the Belleford would probably have communicated with the jewelry shop. Probably, too, he was at that moment conferring with J. Buckleigh Hunt.

She never *had* liked the man—and he had dared to criticize her own dead Bill. No man could get away with that and not pay for it. But, even so, she would not have tipped off the bulls anonymously if Hunt had not been so mean about that thousand dollars. As it was, the crafty Mr. Hunt was likely to make a sojourn in a high-walled country spot just outside the Quaker City.

Madge herself was vacation bound—not to Atlantic City, as she had related, but to Europe, where she meant to rest for quite some time. Her passage was bought and her passport made out, under a name that no one would ever associate with the former Madge the Mouse. In fact, except for this accidental slip today, she had played straight ever since her release from a New York prison.

"It's funny," she giggled to herself, as she stared out of the window, "no-

body stands to lose a thing except old J. Buckleigh. The jeweler will get his bar-pin back—and I've four thousand to spend—thanks to the fact that Hunt hadn't nerve enough to pull the job himself."

Then she opened her handbag once more and smoothed out four genuine bills—her share of the swag—less the single one she had given to the store manager as a matter of precaution.

"Let's see—that's right," she calculated, and rehearsed the transaction over again in her keen little brain. "First, I have ten really-truly thousand-dollar bills—all in a nice little stocking bundle. Beside them, in my purse, I had another package just like it—only Uncle Sam didn't print *that* paper."

"The first time, I hand the jewelry chap the genuine money—nine thousand dollars. That leaves me the one bill I'd saved by selecting a cheaper pin than Hunt had in mind. Then, when the salesman comes back—and I've changed my mind twice—I'm supposed to slip him the spurious stuff. Hunt felt sure that, having examined it once, they'd take the bills a second time without questioning them."

She paused in her observations, to congratulate herself. "Nice nut I'd have been to try such a trick as that!"

What she had done instead, was this:

While the clerk was absent, verifying the real money, she divided the spurious package in half. On the top of one bundle of five counterfeit notes she placed the genuine bill still in her possession. Then she waited.

In due course of time she learned that the original money was real—which, of course, she had known all along. Then she "changed her mind." So, according to plan, the nine genuine thousand-dollar bills were returned to her and slipped into her bag with apparent carelessness. But Madge was

never careless for the fraction of a moment.

At that point in the transaction, her bandbag contained nine genuine bills. It also hid two packages of similar appearance. One was composed of five counterfeits and a genuine banknote. The other had five utterly worthless bills.

To secure the bar-pin again, she must hand out nine bills—and she was not taking chances on being tripped up in that. She had noticed the blue-pencil mark on the topmost bill—but to rely on returning that alone would be much too risky.

Her long, slender fingers moved with the skill and swiftness of a magician's wand, and presto! she had in her bag *two* packages and not three. One of these she gave back to the store manager—a little crumpled wad. In it were five counterfeit notes and four genuine ones—those of Treasury parentage being outside, of course. The sight of the marked one and the feel of the other four had satisfied the jewelry man—and Madge had departed.

So, when she stepped into her limousine, her bag still held six genuine thousand-dollar certificates. She peeled off five and crammed them into a hole in the lining of her bag. The four counterfeits and one genuine thousand, she meant to give to Hunt.

Having planned beforehand her method of getting out of the limousine, and ridding herself of Mr. Hunt's society, she felt that *one* of the real banknotes would do to deceive him. Besides, she shrewdly surmised, the sight of the bar-pin would divert his thoughts and throw him off his guard. He would also imagine, naturally, that she meant to return with him, and further discuss the matter at the hotel.

But Hunt's unsportsmanlike attitude had robbed her of an extra thousand, hidden away in the torn lining of her

bag. It had forced her to give him one of the spendables she hoped to keep for herself. In its place, she still had in her possession one of the counterfeits. And that made her furious, until her sense of humor came to her rescue.

"Four thousand really isn't so bad for a little job like that," she reflected, as she made her way along the aisle to the retiring-room. "By this time tomorrow I'll be on the briny deep, where

no one will know the difference—and, unless I'm much mistaken, friend Hunt will be in a cell. If he squeals on me, he'll prove that he was the *master mind*!"

Then she tucked the four pretty treasury notes into her stocking, and proceeded to roll the spurious one into a little toreh. From a gold cigarette-case, she extracted a perfumed Egyptian roll and proceeded to light it with the incriminating bill.



An imprisoned debutante drops two notes from her window—one is found by a burglar and one by a handsome young man. Both go to her rescue, and complications follow. Learn of them by reading Crosby George's story, "Help! Help!" in the August 15th SAUCY STORIES.

It Looked That Way

By Harry Irving Shumway

IT seemed a case of love at first sight. Madelaine and I wasted little time after our first meeting. We were married a fortnight later.

Yet what promised undying love at the first sight soon became something else. Madelaine had an ungovernable temper. She nagged. Perhaps I am not perfect. Love can be a nightmare.

Five years have gone by—five long years. Five years of bickering and—hell.

I visited an oculist today. He said I needed glasses—had needed them badly for probably half a dozen years. Said my eyes were away off.

Love at first sight?

See your oculist first.



Her System

By Katharine Keife

COUSIN JANET is to marry
Her fourth husband soon, I hear;
She divorced her first two bridegrooms—
Latest one's been dead a year.
Question is: Does she conscript them,
Or do they all volunteer?

The Call for Help

By Crosby George

HE did not look like a second-story man. His eyes were not sinister, menacing or cunning with the craft of a man perpetually alert for the police. They were blue and harmless. His clothes were not those commonly associated with the profession of removing from the dressers, jewel-safes, and necks of matrons the jeweled fruits of their husbands' toil. He was not attired in shapeless trousers. He wore a suit of blue serge, the trousers of which bore a crease as sharp as the prow of a battleship. No nondescript cap hung rakishly over one eye. Instead, a black derby of extreme style in regard to brim and shape was fastened at the precise angle recommended in the "What the Man Will Wear" columns of theatre programs.

He did not look like a second-story man. And for a very good reason. He was no second-story man.

Yet, this balmy evening in late August, he was carefully climbing up a short ladder which was resting against the wall of a house he had never before entered.

Archie Drewe was not enjoying the exercise. Ladder-climbing was no hobby of his. His taste ran to the collecting of antiques and rare pictures. He was intensely interested in the flora of the Caribbean Islands. He loved a quiet game of chess. And yet this evening he had abandoned the very latest book on the subject of Caribbean flora and a most intriguing chess-problem to go ladder-climbing.

The answer was, of course, Romance.

It was the bright eyes of a fair lady that were drawing him up the ladder. It was the soft voice, the liquid tears of a beautiful woman that were impelling him to this adventure so contrary to his quiet routine of life.

But Archie told himself that it was not so much love for his Hortense that was responsible for his presence here this night, but pity for her.

Archie had a heart that suffered with every suffering creature, and Hortense Lute had moved it tremendously when she had told him of her husband.

"Oh, he's a brute," she said tonelessly. "All day and half the night he's absorbed in his work—his work!" she ended with a tragic clenching of her two bejeweled hands.

Archie's mild eyes watered slightly in sympathy.

"You poor kid!" he said.

"His stupid work!" repeated Hortense tensely.

Archie had only recently taken up residence in the quiet suburb of Ashcroft. Consequently he knew neither the husband of Hortense nor the nature of the work that had come between husband and wife. But even one hasty glance at the slim, firm figure of Hortense, at her beautiful dewy eyes, thoroughly convinced him that whatever the lifework Mr. Lute was engaged in, it ought to be abolished by law.

"Poor girlie!" he uttered sympathetically, and found himself patting her hand.

Thus encouraged, Hortense continued her woes. She found it exceedingly romantic to meet a young man from her own suburb in a smart city tea-room for the purpose of talking about herself.

"And do you think I'm allowed a word in my own household?" she asked. "No; everything is run to suit my precious husband; everything is run to suit *his* convenience. I'm no better than a slave of his whims—a slave," said Hortense passionately.

"There, there, everything is bound to turn out all right," sympathized Archie, patting the other hand.

The upshot of this conversation and several others of like nature was that Archie began to feel himself in love with Hortense. At least that was the only way to explain the glow that occurred in the region of his heart whenever he met Hortense in the city. And when she mentioned that clandestine meetings in the city were getting harder and harder to manage, he asked if he couldn't see her in her own home—some time when Mr. Lute was not present.

Hortense blushed faintly.

"That would be so romantic," urged Archie; "please say yes."

After an hour and a half of importunities on his part, Hortense gave utterance to the precious monosyllable.

She was immediately plunged into doubt as what Archie must think of her for being so easily persuaded to grant his request. After he had assured her for the twentieth time that she was to him the dearest, sweetest, and purest woman in the world, she displayed a livelier interest in the idea of Archie's coming to see her.

"Come Wednesday night. If my husband's out, I'll place a Japanese lantern in the library window. If it's lit, you'll find a ladder in the garden. Go up the

ladder to the window. I'll be waiting for you in the library."

"Why can't I—er—come in through the door?" inquired Archie.

"The servants would see you," exclaimed Hortense in horror, "and the news would be all over town by morning."

"But if they see me climbing up on a ladder—" began Archie.

"I'll see to it that they're all busy in some other part of the house," said Hortense; "and as the library window is quite invisible from the street, you're absolutely safe."

And so, having seen the Japanese light in the window and found the ladder, Archie was on his way up to his rendezvous.

As he mounted the ladder, he perspired gently. It seemed to him he was only too conspicuous. It seemed to him it would be only a matter of a few moments before a rude hail from the garden below would cause his blood to freeze. Visions of a rough handling on the parts of the brutal Mr. Lute swam before him.

"This is the last time I ever do anything as idiotic as this," he informed himself grimly as he continued his upward progress. "Romance or no romance—never again!"

Just then his clutching fingers found themselves scraping on stone. He raised his head. He saw that he was at the very sill of the library window.

With infinite caution he raised himself until his eyes were level with the sill. He saw only the Japanese lamp standing on a table close to the window. The light from the lamp dazzled his eyes. He could see nothing beyond the lamp.

Slowly he mounted to the sill. He seated himself across its breadth. He began softly to push open the window.

His heart stopped beating. A wild

shiver coursed through his blood. He sought to squeeze himself into as small a volume of space as possible. Then he forced himself to turn his eyes downward to investigate the cause for the dull thud he had just heard come up from the fragrant spaces below.

His eyes, straining through the dark, confirmed his worst fears. The ladder had slipped from the window and was lying on the ground below, hopelessly out of reach.

For a searing instant Archie was sure he had been discovered; that someone in the garden had pulled down the ladder. But as no threatening sound rose from below, he concluded mournfully that it had been some chance abrupt movement of his own that had cut off his retreat.

Now that it was impossible to go back, Archie began to wish he had never left the comfortable safety of his own rooms to go on this mad adventure. He thought longingly of his chess-board and the beautiful colored plates in *The Flora of Porto Rico*. After all, a woman was only a woman, but a real hobby was a joy forever.

Archie sighed. Even if he wanted to go back, he couldn't. It was absolutely necessary to go on to further thrills whether he enjoyed thrills or not. He decided that he did not.

He resumed his task of opening the window. It rose with only one squeak to blanch Archie's face.

Cautiously he lowered one leg over the sill and waited for something to happen. Nothing did. Only the soft breathing of the night wind through the trees and his own hard breathing came to him. He threw the other leg over the sill. Then he stood erect and parted the taupe silk curtains that enclosed the window from the room.

He found himself peering intently into the small, sinister opening of a blue-black automatic.

II

"HA-HANDS up!" quavered the shaky voice of a man.

Archie put them up. He blinked dazedly at the man whose skinny fingers gripped the weapon.

He was a short man, a thin man, a meek-looking man, an undignified man in the worn purple dressing-gown he was wearing. Apparently he was quite as much frightened as Archie. The automatic wavered dizzily in his hand.

"P-put that thing down!" gasped Archie from between dry lips, "it—it's liable to go off."

"S-s-sit down there," stammered the other man, indicating a chair with his free hand, "s-sit down there or—or I'll plug you," he ended loudly.

He waved the gun at Archie wildly.

Archie plumped down upon the chair. If the chair hadn't been there he would have sat down upon the floor. His legs would no longer support him in the style to which he was accustomed.

But even in his distress one corner of his brain was busy with a startling question.

Was this meek little man the brutal husband of whom Hortense had complained so piteously? Archie concluded that he must be. He certainly was dressed as if he belonged in this house.

Then—Hortense had deceived him. In order to win his sympathy she had painted her husband as a cruel monster when in reality he was a timid, mouse-like little man. Why, he seemed more afraid of the weapon in his hand than even Archie was.

This reflection restored Archie's self-confidence amazingly. By the time Mr. Lute had backed up to the big mahogany table in the center of the room and gaspingly reached for the telephone, Archie was in full control of himself.

"Just a moment," he bade the other man. "There's a mistake somewhere."

"Keep where you are," shrilled the little man in terror. "I'm not responsible for what happens to you if you move. I'll let lead into you." The contrast between the deadly words and the meek tones in which they were spoken moved Archie to smile.

"Police Headquarters," gasped Sylvester Lute into the phone.

"I tell you you are making a serious mistake," said Archie forcefully.

In a panic the other man jiggled the receiver up and down.

"Police?" he questioned into the transmitter. "This is Sylvester Lute talking, No. 3 Elbron Place. I've got a big crook up here; a desperate character. Please come right away."

"Good Lord," groaned Archie. Panic now seized him. He started up. His eyes roved all over the library for some avenue of escape.

He saw two walls lined with shelves crowded with books. Ordinarily Archie's eyes would have lingered lovingly upon these shelves for, judging by the looks of these volumes, there were among them many old manuscripts and first editions. Old books were a passion with Archie. But just now his eye passed rapidly from this exhibition of treasures and his glance started upward.

In the space above the low bookshelves Archie saw two hanging canvases. One was evidently a Turner. The other, a Titian—no, concluded Archie quickly, it was only an imitation. The color wasn't handled correctly. There was too much—good heavens, how could he think of this when his liberty was in danger?

Archie's eyes flew to the third wall. Against this stood a large cabinet filled with *objets d'art*. Even in his frantic glance Archie observed a Sevres vase, an Indian chibouk, and several marvelous, translucent Chinese glasses.

"If you persist in moving around I—I shall be forced to use extreme meas-

ures," came nervously from the little man at the table.

Archie's attention turned to this man. In spite of his own agony of mind, he was forced to laugh at the pitiable funk of his captor.

At the sound of the laugh Sylvester Lute's hand convulsively closed upon the automatic. The finger on the trigger trembled.

Archie paled. His brain spun with the wild need for some way to get out of this accursed room.

There was only one way, he concluded swiftly. He must get that gun out of his captor's hand. The rest would be easy.

But how could he get the gun away? In fiction and in the movies it was always a simple matter for the underdog suddenly to wrench away the weapon from his captor's hand. But in this case he didn't even know how to begin.

Archie's brow wrinkled with the mighty problem of how to free himself. A tiny ghost of an idea crept forth.

He assumed a calmness he was far from feeling.

"All right, I'll behave," he said as nonchalantly as he could. "I know when I'm caught, and you've caught me. But let me ask you: do I look like an ordinary burglar to you?"

The other man's gentle eyes opened wide.

"I—don't know. I—I haven't given the question any thought," he stammered.

Archie smiled grimly. Was this inoffensive creature the man who had destroyed Hortense's happiness? Was this the monster who neglected the despairing woman for his work?

Archie's jaw dropped. Light flooded his brain.

Of course Mr Lute neglected his wife for his work. Archie believed it. Archie understood it. If Mr. Lute's work was the collecting of *objets d'art*,

and pictures, and old books, as it evidently was, why, he was perfectly justified in neglecting his wife for it. Archie would doubtless have done likewise if he had a wife.

He drew a horrified breath. Why, if Hortense divorced this man and married Archie, she would be constantly quarreling with him over his hobbies, as she doubtless did with the mild Mr. Lute.

In that moment Archie's heart went out to the little man who was holding the automatic pointed at him. In him he beheld not a wife-beater, a destroyer of feminine happiness, but a gentleman of learning and good taste—a fellow-collector.

Having made this pleasant discovery, Archie found it easy to proceed.

"I'll be frank with you. I'm not an ordinary burglar," said Archie, "I didn't come for your money or your jewelry—"

He broke off seeming to discover the imitation Titian for the first time. "By the way, that's an awfully clever copy of the Titian owned by Rensler Pratt," he remarked with a wave of his hand at the picture.

The little man started.

"It's nothing of the sort," he exclaimed excitedly; "it's an original."

"A clever copy," repeated Archie, coolly; "the color is good, but Titian never isolated and enchaned a patch of color like that cloud in the foreground. That technical trick must be the property of the artist who copied it."

The jaw of the little man dropped perceptibly.

"But I must compliment you on that bust," continued Archie, pointing to a rose-and-black porphyry bust of Rameses III that graced the top of a book-case.

"It's a genuine eighteenth-century Egyptian," he ended.

The little man was obviously pleased.

"I know it," he said earnestly. "I've got even better stuff than that in the

cabinet," he boasted, giving way to his collector's delight of discussing his possessions. "At the Peters' Galleries I picked up a marvelous piece of basalt sculpture from Cairo—"

"A female figure with a hieroglyphic inscription on the front," stated Archie, who had often seen that piece on display.

"Yes—yes," gasped Mr. Lute. "How—how do you know about it?"

"That's my profession," said Archie; "and as for this particular piece, I ought to know all about it. I came here to steal it from you."

III

SYLVESTER LUTE gazed at Archie in dumb astonishment.

Archie went on with his lie quite calmly.

"I love collecting," he said sincerely, "but I haven't the means to indulge my desires. I make my living by obtaining for collectors who have the means, any particular object they desire. I have no scruples concerning the means by which I obtain the object—when a collector refuses to strike a bargain with me."

"But," argued Mr. Lute, "you didn't bargain with me for this piece."

"Oh, I took a fancy to this piece for myself. I could never pay you the sum you might rightfully ask for the Rameses. So I determined to use the infallible means I have employed before to get possession of it."

His voice changed. It became low and trembly:

"You collectors, who have only to sign your name to a check to possess whatever you desire, can have no notion of the feeling in the heart of the man who can only long to possess beautiful things. You can't understand—"

Mr. Lute was visibly affected. His hand loosened its grip upon the weapon. His eyes softened.

"What a pity!" he murmured, shaking

his head sorrowfully; "what a pity!"

"You don't know what it is to want a beautiful thing and not be able to obtain it," repeated Archie.

"I do," said Mr. Lute; "believe me, young man, I do. See that porcelain tureen on the top shelf of the cabinet? There is the mate to that in the house of a man I know. I've wanted the mate for years. My collection is absolutely incomplete without it. And the man who owns the mate won't part with it at any price. He simply wants to spite me. He's just pig-headed."

"Why don't you hire me to get it for you?" asked Archie boldly.

Mr. Lute held up his other hand as if pushing away temptation. "That would not be ethical," he faltered.

"Is it honorable for him to refuse to sell you the mate?" argued Archie. "You must meet his weapons by similar ones. Give me the commission. I guarantee perfect results."

"I—I don't know," faltered Mr. Lute.

"I'll do it for nothing," cajoled Archie, "if you don't turn me over to the police."

Mr. Lute made a gesture of refusal. But there was a gleam in his eye, the fanatical gleam of a collector on the trail of a real bargain.

"I don't say I consent," he wavered, "but—if I do, what proof have I that you will actually do as you say?"

"My word of honor as a collector," said Archie with simple fervor. And he resolved to part with everything he possessed, if necessary, to obtain that porcelain tureen for Mr. Lute.

"Well, then—perhaps—perhaps—"

"Good!" exclaimed Archie with real emotion at his deliverance.

His heart went out to Mr. Lute. What a generous, fair-minded man was this husband of Hortense. Not in many years had Archie met a man with whom he had so much in common.

And this good man was the man

whom Hortense had so often accused of being hard to get along with! Archie couldn't believe it.

In that moment every shred of feeling he had left for Mrs. Lute went up in invisible smoke.

The moment after Archie saw a sudden change in Mr. Lute's expression. The little man looked scared. His eyes, directed at something behind Archie, were humble and respectful.

Archie turned in his chair.

He saw Hortense Lute, in a magnificent black gown, standing in the doorway, contemplating with astonishment the sight of her husband and lover in amiable conversation.

IV

"Hortense!" exclaimed her husband, getting to his feet.

"Hortense!" exclaimed Archie to himself, doing likewise.

Advancing into the room without noticing Archie, she addressed her husband.

"There are two police-officers at the door downstairs," she said; "they say they received a call for help from here. I don't understand."

"A—a mistake, I'm sure," spluttered Mr. Lute; "I—I sent no call for help."

"Then it might be well for you to go down and explain to them," recommended Mrs. Lute in an icy tone that caused a shiver to run down Archie's spine. He had never thought her capable of using that tone to her brutal husband, poor fellow.

"Yes, my dear," said Mr. Lute meekly; "I—I'm sure Mr.—er—Mr. Brown will entertain you while I'm away."

As he left the room, Hortense eagerly went over to Archie.

"How did this happen?" she asked in her most romantically tense manner.

"I got your signal," said Archie mis-

erably, pointing to the lantern still in the window.

"One of the servants must have lit it without my instructions," whispered Hortense. "Does my husband suspect who you are; why you came here?"

"He takes me for a burglar," said Archie. Under the compelling eyes of the woman he once thought he loved, he reluctantly explained.

"You're wonderful!" breathed Hortense in admiration when he had concluded. "I'm terribly sorry you were disappointed when you came up the ladder, but—I'll meet you in the city tomorrow—the same place."

Archie gulped. He rallied all his forces. He might as well have it over with now.

"I—I don't think we'd better meet each other like that any more," he managed.

The beautiful eyes that had led him so far astray showed incredulous astonishment.

"I—I like your husband," continued the honest lad. "He and I have many tastes in common. I can't become friends with him, however, if I continue at the same time—you understand, don't you?"

Evidently she did, for she uttered a choked cry.

"It's simply wonderful!" continued Archie with enthusiasm, "he's interested in everything that I am—pictures, curios, books, old manuscripts and everything. And he has the real collector's spirit—he won't allow anything to balk him when he's after some particular addition to his collection. I've never met a man more to my taste."

"Stop!" commanded Hortense. "Do you mean to say that you prefer my husband's friendship to mine?"

"I—I don't see why you and I can't remain friends, too—just friends," stammered Archie.

"Well I do!" raved Hortense, and at that moment she was not at all beauti-

ful; "do you think I'm going to receive you in this house quietly, calmly, as if nothing had ever happened between us, just because you're as crazy as my husband about old daubs and pieces of clay?"

She paused for breath.

But before she had obtained it, her husband came into the room.

V

His face bore a satisfied expression.

"I persuaded the police it was all a mistake," he said genially. He broke off, however, as he became aware of the tension in the air.

"What's the matter here?" he asked bewilderedly.

"I'll tell you," said Mrs. Lute, beside herself with the fury of a woman scorned; "you've let yourself be made a fool of by this man. Do you know why he came here tonight, through the window?"

"Why, y-yes, he told me," stammered Mr. Lute.

"And you believed him!" shrieked Mrs. Lute, who was hardly conscious now of what she was saying. "Well, I'll tell you the real reason—he came to see me!"

"No!" gasped Mr. Lute.

"No?" repeated Mrs. Lute hysterically. "Look at him and then decide if what I'm saying isn't the truth."

Mr. Lute looked. Archie could not meet his eye.

Mr. Lute stiffened. He straightened to his full five-feet-two-and-three-quarters. He looked searchingly from his wife to Archie and back again.

He pointed commandingly to Mrs. Lute and then to the door. "Leave us!" he demanded.

She stared unbelievably.

Her husband repeated his command, a half-tone higher.

Mrs. Lute trembled.

"Don't do anything rash, Sylvester," she begged in a parched whisper.

"Leave us!" commanded the little man majestically, for the third time.

She half walked, half stumbled to the door.

VI

OUTSIDE the library door she stopped. There she waited, breathless and tense.

And yet she was pervaded by a happy glow. Her pride was flattered, because, there, behind the library door, two men were bitterly quarreling—about her. It was a situation to please any woman.

But, as the moments sped, her joy in this situation ebbed. Why didn't Sylvester come out and tell her what had happened? Why wasn't there the sound of angry voices? What was going on behind the door?

She dared not think of what might be going on there. And yet she could think of nothing else.

She had never seen Sylvester so aroused. In his red rage he might—he might attack Archie Drewe.

Hortense calmed herself. That was preposterous. Archie was a younger and stronger man. Sylvester would never venture physical combat with the odds so strongly against him.

Then she gasped. Her brain reeled. She had suddenly remembered that there was an automatic lying on the table within easy reach of Sylvester's hand. So that was why Sylvester had ordered her out of the room. *He was going to shoot Archie!*

For a moment Hortense thought she

was going to faint. With a tremendous effort she retained consciousness. Crouching against the wall she waited in agony the piercing sound of a shot. Oh, if she could only scream, what a relief it would be!

An eternity passed. The same deadly silence prevailed; continued to prevail.

Hortense now breathed in tortured gasps. Why was there no sound? A horrible supposition flamed through her mind. The men had killed each other. Or at least battered each other unconscious.

She could contain herself no longer. She must see what was happening behind that door.

Her trembling hand found the knob. It was some time before she could summon sufficient strength to turn the knob. Slowly, inch by dreadful inch, she drew open the door.

She gazed into the room with dilated eyes. She gasped with horror at the sight that met her eyes.

What was happening in the library was far worse than anything she had imagined, crouching outside the door. Even as she gazed, she realized with a deadly sinking of the heart that there was a far stronger bond between her husband and her former admirer than existed between her husband and herself or Archie and herself.

Neither of the men stirred as she stared at them.

Sitting opposite each other at the table in the center of the room, their heads almost touching as they leaned over the table, Sylvester and Archie were profoundly absorbed in a game of chess!



A Dead Man's Business

By Dixie Willson



LETTY PINKUS was a pretty little thing. Not a w f u l l y striking, nor awfully brilliant, and not in position really to be either, inasmuch as she was merely a waitress in her mother's boarding-house. But Letty Pinkus was mighty sweet and pretty, there was no avoiding that.

Of course she was only eighteen, which is sweetness and prettiness in itself, but she had something entirely unforgettable about her eyes and that was what old Bill Cooper fell madly in love with.

Bill Cooper had never really had anything to love in all his life. He was a sailor—a parrot-nosed sailor, as rough as they make 'em, and rich enough to get drunk all he pleased. He had no family at all—except one crook of a nephew—and, like every old sailor, though he had had eighty sweethearts, he'd wanted no one of them more than a week.

Then one day in May he met Letty Pinkus.

He was just in from Salvador with his ditty bag on his shoulder, and his new "fire-eye" pinned up tight in his pocket.

It was really the thought of his "fire-eye" that first made him notice Letty. A piece of black velvet is all very well, but there's nothing for jewels like a woman's white neck.

Bill didn't know just what his jewel was. It looked like an opal, yet was diamond-like in clearness, and sometimes it seemed really crystallized fire!

No one had ever seen another. It was as large as a berry, and they said Bill had a fortune in it!

It hypnotized a man like an eye looking at him! Bill hadn't wanted the thing. What did an old sailor want of a Queen's priceless gem? He hadn't wanted it—no—but he'd gone back and gone back and gone back to look at it, till finally he'd spent every cent that he had to buy it from the son of the old caveman who'd gone crazy watching the lights in it.

Letty Pinkus wore a dark blouse with the neck open, and when Bill passed the bench where she was sitting in the park, it came into his whimsical old mind that maybe the girl would try his jewel on her neck for him.

He'd been itching to see how it really would look with some other background than his dirty hand or the grimy velvet it was tied in. It was strung on a cord through a hole in one end of it.

He walked past her once and then went back again—walked past her again, and then went up and asked her.

She was startled at first, but Bill wasn't a bad sort, and after a minute she smiled and said—yes, she would.

So Bill hung the "fire-eye" on Letty's white neck. Then he caught his breath—and twitched his fingers. It seemed that the sun, moon and stars were shining there! He hadn't *dreamed* the thing was like *that*! He hadn't dreamed anything in the world was like that! It was almost alive!

It frightened Letty Pinkus so much that she immediately untied it and gave it back again.

Bill laughed, pinned it into the velvet, and told her he was hunting a boarding-house.

"Mother's got one," she suggested; "at sixty-four James Street. Six dollars a week."

But Bill didn't go. He found the four-dollar place where his pals were, and it was as all right there as it usually was, only Letty Pinkus came into his sleep so much that next day he packed his bag, and hunted 64 James Street, after all.

Letty opened the door for him.

"Oh," she smiled, "I've waited for you since yesterday."

Bill grinned almost out loud.

"I wasn't comin'," he said—"but I got thinkin' about you."

Letty blushed a bit shyly, invited him in, and took him upstairs to the second-floor-front.

"Say, put on my stone again, will you?" he asked her. "I never seen anything all my life long as purty as that on your neck."

He tied it on awkwardly, and while she moved about with towels and a blanket, he watched every flash of the radiant thing, like a bit of flame.

Then she gave it back, touching it half fearfully. She told him supper would be ready at six.

"And I'll bring some hot water," she said.

Bill left the door open so he could hear her feet on the stairs. He picked up a flower she'd dropped out of her belt. He shut his eyes to bring her face back into the room—then, rather suddenly, he slouched back against the wall, and shut his fingers tight around the bed-post.

But after a minute he straightened up again, and brought a scrap of scrubby paper and a pencil from his pocket.

At a quarter to six Letty Pinkus took a tin bucket of hot water upstairs.

Bill's door was ajar. She knocked softly, then pushed it open and went into the room.

A minute later Mrs. Pinkus, downstairs at the stove in the kitchen, felt Letty's hand on her arm, cold as a touch of snow. Her face was utterly bloodless.

"Mother," she gasped, "that old sailor is dead!"

And he was. All slumped down in the chair by the window. Drink had got his heart at last.

There was a crumpled yellow flower in his hand. Beside him was a scrap of dirty paper across which was scribbled:

I want this here Letty Pinkus to have my jewel.

Signed,

Bill Cooper,

May twenty.

II

BILLY KING, at a rear table in Shoof's café, brought out his wallet, and counted the bills he had—one five and two ones. He was a slick young loafer—pickpocket by profession—a grafting sort of chap who'd never done an honest turn in his life.

"There you are, Kid," he said to the dark fellow with him. "Go as far as you like, but right here's all I've got. You know yourself that things have been damn skinny lately."

The Kid laughed shortly.

"Yeh. Damn skinny for me," he replied; "but I got one thing doped out all right. I ain't going broke no longer, with you owin' me seventy-five bones, and goin' around yourself with silk socks and a mustache."

Billy twisted the ends of the criticized mustache and laughed from one corner of a cigarette mouth.

"You got one green hundred in your vest," he remarked. "I saw you put it there."

"Yes," the Kid replied, "for sellin' my mother's old show clothes; and she's goin' to get every cent of it, too. Me—I'm so broke 'at I'm cock-eyed, and I want what you owe me down, now."

"Well, go ahead, collect," Billy said nonchalantly. "Here's seven. Go after the rest anyway you want to."

The Kid reached for the five and the ones, and folded them into his pocket. Billy King picked up a newspaper, pushed himself against the wall and looked up the sporting sheet. The waiter shuffled past them with ham and fried potatoes.

"Fella' was askin' fer you last week, Billy," the waiter remarked as he passed. "Hook-nosed old salt with a scar on his eye—"

Billy crunched the paper on his knees and looked up quickly.

"What! Not Uncle Bill!" he exclaimed. "Is he back? And me tryin' to fret myself earnin' some money! He's the Unc I was named for, and me and him is the whole family! If I can find him any place, I'm sittin' pretty!"

He laughed, shoved up his chair and got out of it, and the Kid backed away from the table and followed him down the street and across the market to the shambled two-story frame affair in Pell Street, where Billy remembered old Bill had hung out.

Billy only hoped the grog had been flowing freely, for he knew well enough that when old Bill was sober he had no love to spare for this one piece of "family."

Though Bill was a rough one himself, his idea was that only good effort deserves good reward, on which principle Billy King deserved much less than nothing, which was exactly as much of old Bill Cooper's honestly-earned goods as old Bill Cooper ever intended Billy to have.

At the door of the sailor shack Billy knocked hard and waited until the

slovenly woman who kept the place answered.

Yes, Bill Cooper had been there, but he'd left a week before for some place up in James Street—sixty-four, she believed.

So Billy and the Kid went to 64, James Street.

Letty Pinkus wasn't home. Nervous little Mrs. Pinkus let them in. When Billy asked for the old sailor, she was startled at first, then she took up her apron and wiped her eyes at the corners.

"God bless me, he's dead!" she said. "Died awful sudden, and we give him up to the mate of his ship. It has shook us up awful, his comin' and goin'."

Billy's breath came in chunks for a minute.

"Well, where did he—what did he do with his money?" he asked. "I'm the only relation he's got."

Little Mrs. Pinkus shook her head. "I do' know as he had any," she informed him. "The mate said he spent all he had down in Africa for the gem he give Letty. That's worth a terrible lot."

She put down her apron and twitched her shoulders a little. The whole affair was still disturbing to her.

"They say we won't be keepin' boardin'-house next week, when Letty sells that di'mond."

The Kid plucked Billy's coat-tail.

"Let's see it," he suggested. "Anyway, we ought to look over Bill's clothes and stuff."

Mrs. Pinkus stepped back inside.

"Why, yes, come right in," she said, and smiled sympathetically at Billy, whose lame expression she took to be grief at his uncle's demise. "It's a terrible shock, ain't it? Come right in the parlor. Letty ain't here, but I'll show you the di'mond. It's only fair you should see it."

Billy and the Kid pulled off their plaid caps, and followed Mrs. Pinkus

into the parlor—a dark room with a dark lot of furniture—an organ—a “stand”—and a vase of glass roses. Mrs. Pinkus went into a room farther back, and presently returned with a small wad of velvet.

“He wrote on a paper that Letty should have this,” she explained as she untied it. “I guess she just struck him. When he died he was holdin’ a flower of hers.”

And then, on the dull velvet square, she suddenly disclosed the jewel like a drop of flame.

The Kid leaned forward and exclaimed sharply.

“God, look at it!” he whispered. “What’s the thing made of?”

Gingerly he touched it—then picked it up in his fingers.

“We put it under Letty’s spy glass,” Mrs. Pinkus volunteered, “and it burns you to look at it.”

She watched nervously as the Kid fingered it, and tears came up in her eyes.

“It seems like it can’t be real,” she quavered—“that just for that there little thing I needn’t be workin’ so hard all the time, and my Letty havin’ some dresses and pretties. She’s such a good girl, it’s right that she should, but I never thought she’d get it in *this* world. Folks don’t. Ain’t it wonderful? We always been just—”

“Did he leave any clothes?” Billy interrupted; “or some papers? Where did they take him?”

“They took him away,” Mrs. Pinkus replied, “all the sailors did, some place. I’ll put this here thing back, and get you the address.”

She tied up the velvet and left them a minute, then brought back a paper with the address of a sailor’s home.

“That’s all I can tell you,” she said. “It was heart trouble, terrible sudden and nobody with him. They proved it was his writin’ on the paper to Letty,

then took him away, and that’s all I can tell you.”

Billy thanked her—she patted his shoulder and told him she felt for him—left all alone—

“—and I hope there’s no hard feelin’ for Letty,” she added. “It may look like ‘t ought to be yours, but of course a man’s last dyin’ wish is what God means should happen.”

Half an hour later Billy and the Kid stopped at Cuff’s corner for beer.

The place was deserted. They took the last table, and Billy sat with his back to the door. They finished their beer and their sandwich-on-rye, then Billy shoved the crumbs and the glasses aside, and from inside his coat brought out that little bunch of velvet—untied it, and against the gray of everything else old Bill’s wonderful stone quivered like the drop of a soul.

The Kid brought his breath sharply through his teeth, and reached out to take it, but Billy with slim fingers simply slid the radiant thing out of sight.

“Of course old Bill was no uncle of yours,” he remarked.

The Kid sniffed.

“Don’t worry,” he said shortly. “I ain’t pickin’ no dead man’s pockets, and what’s more *you* ain’t goin’ to get away with it, neither.”

Billy made a queer noise in his throat.

“What ‘cha mean?” he laughed. “I ‘spose I’ll have ghosts runnin’ after me.”

The Kid rolled a cigarette and tapped it on his finger.

“I don’t know nothin’ about ghosts,” he said. “But I’m tellin’ you one thing I never been fooled on. The last thing a man wants, he’s goin’ to *get*! The old lady was right. I ain’t much on religion, but a dyin’ man’s wish is what God wants should happen. It may be damn long or damn short till it’s fixed, but you can’t get away with no dead man’s business.”

III

BILLY KING lived over Flannigan's tobacco shop by a railroad bridge. The Kid lived with him.

That morning, when the sullen light of five o'clock was just coming in through the fallen-down shutters, Billy got up and dressed, fussed around the Kid's clothes a bit, sewed that hard little kernel of jewel in his own vest lining, then soft-footed it down-stairs, and out into the first gray of daytime.

When it was nine o'clock he got a fellow to trust him for a new suit. He shaved off his mustache, and moved up to Harlem, three hundred blocks from the wharves.

It was noontime before he ate. Then he picked out a bean-smelling bakery across from the house he'd selected to room in.

There were only three others inside. The tables were quiet, but after a minute something happened that, by Fate, should come to every man only once, but that really seems as frequent a state as birth and death and the sun coming up.

A girl came into the place whose presence made Billy's blood tingle instantly.

She was slender, quite small, with a mop of black curls—curls just to her shoulders, thick—soft like a child's—and her eyes were black, too, and her skin cream-white.

She sat down across from Billy and ordered a sandwich. He watched while she ate, and then followed her out.

She stopped at a stand for a paper. He stopped for one, too, and she smiled. So, a bit farther up the street, he spoke to her. He asked if she'd dropped a gold-pencil in the restaurant. Of course she hadn't, and said so, but he gave her his, said he had found it, and she might as well keep it.

She asked his name, and said she thought she'd seen him before.

He told her he was Jim Woods from Minneapolis, and he'd never been in New York till that morning. He wanted to know her name, too, and she laughed and said everybody called her Babe.

He asked if he could see her again, and she said she'd be down at the bakery for supper, so Billy went up to the room he had rented in Clara Casey's square flat, and began to wonder if he was going to have all the trouble of falling in love again.

Babe wore a little corn-flower dress at supper-time. She was already there when Billy went in at six, and she'd left a place beside her that he promptly took. She had a dash of scarlet on her lips, like a kiss painted there, and the something was about her that men dream of when they are waiting for the girl they've never found.

Billy walked home with her after supper, across a little park to the apartment where she lived with her aunt. He wanted to take her to the picture-show where the dauntless Pearl White was saving a city from flood, so she ran upstairs and asked her aunt, and an hour later they followed a flashlight down the aisle of the Blue Palace.

Billy King had been fairly born to Broadway. His sun, since he could remember, had been the white light of Forty-second Street to Fifty-ninth, and he had managed to make "business" good enough so that, with his natural good looks and his air of *sang froid*, he had had a small share of most every little Broadway doll there was. He'd had perfumed kisses from up-to-date lips, and he'd gone into the Plantation with girls who flagged all the attention there was, but he'd never before sat by a girl whose fingers in his really made any difference.

Some people come into your heart

like a tide—just a little at first, then a little bit more—but some like a flood drown you all in a minute. And Babe, with her dark eyes, came that way to Billy.

Three days later in the bakery at supper, they were laughing and counting out rice-pudding raisins, when Minnie, the blonde little clerk, fairly breathless, came in from outside and rushed over to Billy.

"Say, mister," she stammered, "the police is after you! They're over at Clara's huntin' all through your room. Get out of here, quick!"

Billy flashed up from the table. Babe caught at his hand.

"After you," she cried. "Why, how can they want you?"

Billy thought fast. The old lady had followed him down! He snatched a fork from the table, stabbed into his vest, picked out that burning drop of jewel and thrust it into Babe's hand.

"Say, keep this," he whispered sharply. "Be here at twelve, and I'll try sure and meet you. We'll beat it together. Just sit tight if they come. Nobody'd think that *you've* got it."

Babe opened her fingers and saw what she held.

"Why, what—" she said breathlessly—"where did you get it! You *stole* it—you *stole* it—" She looked at him, wide-eyed.

"I'll be here at twelve," Billy whispered. "Sit tight, sweetheart."

Then he brushed past her out to the street, and across it.

But the policemen were on him. Babe saw them duck after him into the crowd—saw him knock past a fruit-stand and dive down a basement—then she suddenly dropped her head into her arms and sobbed wildly, her fingers closed over that glorious thing he had given her.

Minnie came to console her.

"Be still, now," she said gently.

"Nothing's goin' to happen to him. He'll get away. Don't feel so broke up, dearie."

Babe looked up, still sobbing, but laughing through tears.

"Oh, it's just that I'm happy," she said—"oh, I'm happy!"

IV

Two hours later, Billy King, a smear of dirt across his face, and in the company of two rotund policemen, arrived at Headquarters.

"I'm damned if I know what you want!" he insisted coolly. "I've *got* nothing—*done* nothing—give me a—"

And then he saw the Kid waiting for him.

"Hello, Billy." The Kid smiled. "I hated like hell to chase you, but honest, Billy, it was dirty of you to take that hundred bones of my mother's."

Billy's face really flushed, and he fussed for an answer. He'd been ready for a grilling and all the denial on the theft of a million-dollar stone, but the Kid, and that hundred he'd sneaked—it surprised him—surprised him so much, in fact, that he simply admitted, and shelled out the eighty-some that was left of it.

The sergeant wanted to hold him, but the Kid was satisfied.

"He's crooked, I know," the Kid said, "but I guess I can get the rest out of him some time. This'll do."

So he set up cigars, thanked them all, brushed Billy's coat off—and they left the place together.

Neither had much to say for five minutes or so. Billy pulled down his cap and slouched along waiting for the Kid to talk, but when he didn't, and the silence began to hurt both of them, Billy spoke himself.

"What time is it, Kid?" he asked. "I got to get back up to Harlem by twelve."

The Kid laughed.

"Yes, I seen her yesterday when I was trailin' you," he replied. "She's some little peach. I don't blame you."

Billy looked at him sidewise.

"Say, you didn't tell anyone about that—stone?" he asked, after an awkward minute.

The Kid clucked his tongue against his lips.

"Who—me?" he said. "Why should I? I told 'em you picked off my hundred. That's all that was my grief. Old Bill's on his own job and don't you forget it. And now it's—" he pulled out his watch—"it's ten after eleven, if you want to know."

It was the slipping of his watch back in his pocket that reminded him of a paper he carried—a note for Billy.

"Oh, say," he said. "Feller from the sailor's home brought this up to Flannigan's yesterday."

The note was on blue-lined tablet-paper, written in a round, childish hand.

Dear Sir—

Mamma found some letters of Mr. Cooper's, so they're at the sailor place if you want them. A terrible thing happened. Mamma lost the diamond. We think she must have thrown it out with trash. She's so broken up about it thot we're leaving the house and

she's going to Chicogo. So I guess we won't see you again.

*Yours truly,
Letty Pinkus.*

Billy crumpled the note up, threw it into the street, and laughed.

"Well, there you are, Kid," he said. "That's how Bill fixes it. Call off your ghosts. It's all over now—unless some puppy like you helps put somebody wise to me."

The Kid smiled a little.

"There ain't no help needed for a dead man's business," he said. "So long, Billy."

V

At three minutes to twelve Billy got to the bakery. Tim was there, counting cash to close up.

Billy had expected two dark eyes to be watching for him anxiously. He felt a bit disturbed when he saw they weren't there.

"Well, I see you got past the cop-pers," Tim grinned. "How'd you do it?"

"I ran," Billy said shortly. "Where's Babe? Has she been here?"

"Who—that black-eyed kid that visits her aunt?" Tim inquired. "Yeh, she just left. Been in to tell Minnie good-by. Yeh—they all call her Babe—but her name's Letty Pinkus."



Checked!

By Irving Kenwood

"A H-HA!" exclaimed my wife, as she gingerly picked a hair from my coat sleeve.

I didn't like the tone of that "Ah-ha"; it didn't have the pleasant flavor of humor in it. It had more the soothing quality of a meat-axe to it.

"Brown as usual," I said, trying to put the old nonchalance into it. "Brown's my favorite hair. Some day, honey, you're going to find another woman's hair on my coat and then I suppose I'll get—well, I'll catch it."

"Who is she?" said my wife without a bit of amusement.

"Who's who?"

"The owner of that hair!" she snapped.

"Come, come, dear, you've had your joke," I said. "That's your own. Look at the color."

"Color nothing," she retorted. "Look at the length!"

I did. It was about eighteen inches long.

Then I realized the terrible mess I was in.

My wife had just had her's bobbed and the longest hair in her head wasn't more than six inches.



"You've played me for a sucker, eh? You show me the door and throw me out like a dog—I'll get even with you for this!" said the angry theatrical producer to the ingenue, Elinor Faris.

Did he get even? Or did the girl outwit him? You'll find out if you read "When Dealing with a Woman—" in SAUCY STORIES for August 15th.

The House of the Missing

By Sinclair Gluck

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

The young sister of Jack Clayton has disappeared in New York. After weeks of fruitless search, a man from a Secret Bureau of Investigation calls on the brother and tells him that thirty young Society girls have disappeared in the past year, that this Bureau was organized to run down the gang responsible for the kidnapping, and asks Clayton to become one of the organization. The man, Moore, also tells Clayton that there has been a leak in the Bureau of late, as the rooms of some of the members have been ransacked. Suddenly Moore goes stealthily to a curtained window, revolver in hand. There is a loud report. A bullet has grazed Clayton's cheek, and an unknown man staggers from behind the curtains. Moore has shot him through the heart. They find that Clayton's wound is from a strange weapon like an air-gun, carried by the intruder. Lorry, Clayton's servant, an ex-burglar, calls a policeman known to Moore, who removes the body and promises secrecy. Clayton goes with Moore to the Headquarters of the Bureau and becomes a member. He and Moore are to work as partners, though before others they are to appear strangers. They are to pose as men of wealth and position, and try to find a clue to the kidnappers among the members of Society. For the first time in his search for his little sister Margaret, Clayton feels hopeful. But he returns to his apartment to find that his desk has been ransacked!

CHAPTER VI

The First Clue



HE house in which Moore had taken his rooms was back-to-back to Clayton's apartment-house and was of the ordinary brown-stone type so common in

New York. It once had been occupied by a single family; now, owing to changes in the neighborhood and ever mounting rents, it had been split up into apartments. Moore's rooms were on the second floor.

The basement was occupied, he told Clayton, by a grocer, his wife and two children. The first floor served as office and home for a young doctor, while the second floor had been subdivided into two smaller apartments of three rooms

each, with a bathroom common to both.

Of these two, the front apartment belonged to a returned soldier and his somewhat shrill-voiced French bride. Moore had rented the back part of this floor consisting of a bedroom, a small kitchen and a drawing-room. The third floor was unoccupied, but was similar in design to the second.

The house was a large square one, each apartment on the second floor being self-contained and well-lighted, with the common bathroom between, lit only by a small shaft and skylight above. The door to Moore's rooms was just at the head of the stairs and opened into his drawing-room.

This room looked out onto the back garden, so-called, as did his smaller bedroom beyond. His kitchen was the same width as the hall and was the continuation of it, but opened into his drawing-room and not into the hall, so that the

rooms had a single door into the hall. This was fitted with a Yale lock.

The common bathroom was, of course, the difficulty, and was probably the reason why he had found the rooms empty. With the somewhat embarrassing sociability of some old Southern and a few old New York houses, this bathroom had three doors—one into the hall, one into the front flat and one, at the back, into what was now Moore's bedroom. Of these, only the door into the hall was now in use, the other two being nailed up.

There was only one doorbell to the house, which rang in the basement. For a small monthly gratuity the grocer's wife or one of her numerous children opened the door for all visitors. The tenants had keys.

When Clayton crossed over to help Moore install their private telephone, he found him waiting at the front door of the house. He ushered his partner proudly into the drawing-room, furnished in seedy-looking plush. The door was open into his bedroom beyond and the first thing Clayton noticed was a lot of telephone wire, lying on the floor.

"I've put one instrument in already," Moore told him, "and I have the batteries and the instrument for your end. We'll put that in later. I'm a bit of an electrician and the job was an easy one. As for my own instrument—I'm going to keep it in my clothes-closet and keep the closet locked, you see? It will have a buzzer but not a loud one, so that you can get me when I'm here, but mostly I imagine I'll be calling you up. . . .

"You see, I'll have to have a fashionable studio or something somewhere, to carry out my rôle of the dilettante lounge lizard. This place would never do as my official residence, from a social point of view. But it ought to be handy as an 'earth' perhaps."

"What's the idea of keeping the phone in the closet?"

"Well, someone will have to take care of the rooms and I don't want a cleaning-woman messing about it. Trust nobody is our motto, old boy."

"And my end of it?"

"Oh, that doesn't matter so much. You can trust Larry, can't you? We'll put it in your bedroom and you can tell Larry not to let anyone else in there. How's that?"

"That's all right I should think," Clayton told him. "Now, suppose we go over to my rooms and finish the job on the other instrument and then we can do the wiring later, when all's quiet."

"Right! And Clayton, I forgot to tell you that you have an account with the Guaranty Trust on which you can draw up to any amount within reason. Don't forget that, because you may need it. You won't need to itemize your expenses. I fixed that up with the Chief. Now, let's go."

They spent an insane sort of a night. First of all they installed the other instrument, batteries and induction coil in Clayton's bedroom, with an additional buzzer in Larry's room for safety.

They had no trouble in getting the thing into working order, though the outside wiring was difficult as they had to work silently and in the dark.

The same week marked the début of Moore and Clayton in the social game. Moore took a studio in Greenwich Village, furnished it superbly, dabbled in sculpture and invited his ever-growing circle of friends and acquaintances to come to tea, discuss art and view what he described to his partner as his atrocities.

Clayton followed Moore's advice and took to himself the pose of a disillusioned worldling of esthetic tastes.

Night after night they held long conversations over their telephone, comparing notes, so as to avoid each other's tracks as much as possible. In this way they seldom saw each other.

However, Clayton came across Moore's traces once or twice. In answer to a charming letter from Mrs. Furneau, he called and did his best to convince her that he had given up all hope of finding Margaret. He was cynical, disillusioned and self-centered to a point where he wondered that she could stand having him in the house.

However, she was most charming and sympathetic, introduced him to a number of her friends and invited him to become a regular caller at her house in the East Sixties. Mrs. Furneau had a distinct charm of manner, arising from her perfect confidence in herself and her power to please, and Clayton found her circle a wide one and promising for his purpose. Here, one afternoon, much to his amazement he overheard two feminine social butterflies discussing Moore.

"You know, my dear, he must have heaps of money to keep that place going—and he never works except at his sculpting, and I'm sure he never makes any money at that."

"They say he's fearfully dissipated," cut in the other; "but I thought he was charming. Such a bored air and so perfectly self-possessed. He told me that I understood him as no one else did."

"Yes, I dare say," answered the first, unsheathing a claw. "He really needs some pure young thing like you to take him in hand and reform him. It's *such* a pity to see him going to pieces like that."

At this point Clayton moved away, overcome by his emotions, but he repeated the whole conversation to Moore later on and advised him to seize his chance of reform, if she gave it to him.

But it was about ten days after they first launched themselves upon Society that Moore got what he believed to be their first clue.

Clayton had come home late from a small private dance, bewildered and

bored by the shifting panorama of small intrigues and light love-affairs impossible to avoid seeing.

He sat in his bedroom, slowly undressing and wondering what future lay ahead for these girls when some of that charm was gone, when he heard the familiar buzz of the private line. This must be something special, because they had already compared notes of their evening's plans at dinner-time.

Moore's voice was tense. "Hello, Clayton? Good! Darned glad you're at home. . . . Old man, I think there's something stirring at last!"

"Great! What is it?"

"Well, you know I went up to a party on Riverside Drive tonight? My host made his pile doing construction work for innocent and confiding suburban municipalities. Now I guess he's trying to drown his memories in one of the finest cellars in New York and finding plenty of friends to help him. I never saw him before and I never want to see him again, except in the way of our business, but I got what I think is a clue there, and that's the main thing."

"Go on, I'm listening."

"It was just before I left, I'd gone to one of the bedrooms used as a men's cloak-room, to get my hat, when a young fellow blew in, looking for *his* hat. I'd already spotted him as a well-known young rip, with a lot more money than either wits or decency, and I'd been casually introduced to him in the early part of the evening. But now he fell on me like a long-lost friend.

"Not a bad party, eh?" said he. 'But the women aren't up to much. Too damned stand-offish for my taste. Only the same old booze, too. Gee, you oughta been on the party I was on th' other nigh'. Say, I thought I was'n Heaven.'

"I tried to shake him off and get out of there, but he wasn't having any. 'Wai' a minute, I wan' tell you 'bout it.' he said, in an injured tone, so I waited.

"He held a waving finger before me and went on: 'I was like par'dise, I tell ya. I dunno wha' they gave us, but I was lost to the worl', till the next mornin'. They kep' me there all nigh'.

"Where was it?" I asked him.

"'Darned 'f I know. Somewhere outa town. But ol', Babylon and Cornith hadn't a thing on that party. I paid two hundred dollars to go, an' I wouldn't a-missed it for a thousand—girls an' divans and strange things to drink that gave ya the most won'erful dreams. Gee, what a party! They tel' me special, that I wasn't even to mention it, but that's only a a'vertising dodge. Ya can't fool me. That was one of the conditions. Made me swear not to tell before they'd take me! He went off into fits of laughter here,

"Someone else came in just then," Moore continued, "and I noticed that the newcomer stared pretty hard for an instant at the young hopeful. I don't know why. Anyhow, this fellow had some more to say that convinced me he might be useful."

"Sounds like drugs, doesn't it?" Clayton cut in.

"Wait!" said Moore. "When this young fellow had stopped laughing I pumped him gently about the party.

"'I dunno,' he said, 'what they gave us. Musta been some kind of drug, for I had a rotten head the next day.'

"I asked him again where it was.

"'Search me,' he answered. 'They took me there in a closed car an' brought me away in one. Mighta been anywhere a'most.'

"At this point," Moore continued, "the fellow looked up and caught the newcomer's eye and it seemed to sober him. He smiled in a sickly way and began a wild search for his hat. The other man went out right after that. But I had a good look at him and I think I know who he is. Anyhow, the young rip wouldn't talk any more—seemed

scared and sobered—and I came away. But I got the young fellow's address from him."

"What's your idea?" Clayton asked.

"Why, follow him up and try to find out who asked him to the party. Then work it so that you or I get an invitation."

"Sounds promising."

"You bet it does!" said Moore. "Anyhow, I'll follow it up, tomorrow. I'll try to get in touch with the young rip and wheedle some information out of him. But I knew you'd want to know about it first. Besides, it's as well to keep in touch with each other's movements I think. This young fellow lives on West Forty-fourth Street, in the Branscombe. I'll go up there tomorrow afternoon."

"Right. Good luck!"

"Any news at your end?" Moore inquired.

"Not yet!" And they rang off.

CHAPTER VII

The Girl in Gray

THE following afternoon, Clayton had an engagement for tea with Mrs. Furneau. She had told him to come early, ostensibly because they were to have a quiet talk over some plans for amateur theatricals.

Since their second meeting Clayton had made a good deal of an effort to please her and their friendship was on a more or less intimate basis at this time.

It had not been necessary to pretend to much admiration, for Mrs. Furneau was a charming woman. But where Margaret's fate might be even slightly concerned Clayton had none of the scruples he might otherwise have felt.

He had made his admiration for the lady more evident than was perhaps necessary, hoping for the time when their growing intimacy might give him

the opportunity to question her suddenly about his sister and possibly learn something—if there was anything to learn. His former suspicion of her faded, as he knew her better.

So, about half past three, he pulled himself together, assumed a most cynical and disillusioned expression, and set forth for her house.

Their conversation that afternoon, before the arrival of her other guests, was of a personal nature and consisted mainly of subtleties, of which the lady was a past mistress.

Once, however, she referred to the subject never absent from Clayton's thoughts:

"Jack," she said, after a pause and speaking a little wistfully, he thought, "have you really given up all hope of finding your sister?"

She reached out and touched his hand delicately, to soften the reminder if she could.

Clayton nodded. "What's the use? I've looked everywhere, and it's hopeless. Don't let's talk about it. Don't worry about it, but let me go to the devil in my own way."

He smiled bitterly, and glanced away from her, but when he looked back again her eyes were on him with a keenness of scrutiny that he had never seen in them before. There was a little furrow between her pretty brows, too. But she contented herself with:

"It doesn't seem like you, somehow."

"Perhaps not!" he retorted; "but when there isn't a single shred of a trace to go on, what can I do?"

She hesitated a moment. "I didn't ask just to hurt you, I expect Mrs. Fawcett here this afternoon, later on. It was to her house that I took Margaret to luncheon that wretched day, you remember. And I did not know whether you would rather see her again and perhaps question her further, or go away before she comes. She left, you remem-

ber, soon after Margaret's disappearance, on one of her globe-trotting jaunts or something. And I thought, perhaps—"

"Oh, I don't mind seeing her again, if that's what you mean," he answered, though he had never even thought of questioning Mrs. Fawcett; very closely, except to verify the fact that Margaret had left with Mrs. Furneau a little after five. He realized that perhaps he had been careless there.

"But as for questioning her again," he added, "what's the use?"

Mrs. Helen Furneau shrugged her shoulders. "Well, I thought I'd tell you, anyway."

"I appreciate that."

"She's a queer woman," Mrs. Furneau went on. "She used to be ultra-conservative, before her husband died. But since she's been wandering around the globe, with nothing in particular to occupy her, she's taken on a crowd that even I would call queer. And I don't believe anybody ever accused me of conservatism." She laughed whimsically.

Naturally Clayton pricked up his ears at that, then to hide his interest he turned the conversation back to his charming hostess.

Presently the guests began to arrive. They were the usual mixed lot of artists and professionals, with a rich sprinkling of foreigners, for whom Helen Furneau had a particular penchant.

Clayton was deep in cynical platitudes with a round-bodied and rat-eyed little cubist who looked as if he needed scrubbing, when Helen called his name.

She stood at his elbow and, turning, he found himself facing the loveliest girl he had ever seen. She was dressed in gray—clinging, filmy stuff—with a big, gray, floppy hat.

Clayton took that much in, before Mrs. Furneau completed the introduction. Then the girl's big gray eyes met his gravely, lingered a moment, taking

him in, and fell away with just a hint of shyness. She was obviously quite young and obviously out of place in that *galère*.

Clayton was introduced in turn to her aunt, a fussy and voluble person, by all external signs; of the kind that rushes in and so forth. That over, he turned to the girl again with an inward sigh of relief. If he must talk to ratty-eyed cubists for the sake of his search, he thought, there could be no harm in a few moments off duty in such obviously wholesome company.

While Clayton made the remark or two to her Aunt, which convention required, the girl stood talking to Mrs. Furneau. She was speaking as he joined them.

"—most wonderful stuff I ever tasted. You must go and get them to give you some. They *were* funny people, though. I don't believe I like them very—"

She stopped as Clayton came up to them. Clearly, she and her hostess were on the best of terms.

The three of them talked about nothing in particular for a moment and then Mrs. Furneau hurried away to greet newer arrivals and Clayton led the girl to a seat.

She came from Utica, he learned; had never been in New York before this visit to her Aunt. Before long he had her embarked on a description of her impressions of the people she had met in her Aunt's circle. In the meantime he studied the lovely face.

From the point of view of a painter of portraits the features were almost perfect. And with all the beauty of wide gray eyes, straight delicate nose and crimson, sweetly curving lips, she had that added something — expression, spirit, feeling, call it what you will—that made the lovely features really beautiful.

Presently she faltered and colored faintly and Clayton drew his eyes hastily

away. Then, more to cover the momentary embarrassment than anything else, he reverted to the remark he had overheard.

"Won't you tell me what was the most wonderful stuff you ever tasted?" he inquired.

She laughed gayly. "Oh, my Aunt took me to a funny party this afternoon, before we came here. There were all sorts of queer people there and I—I didn't care for it very much. But they gave me some of the most wonderful tea you can imagine. It almost reconciled me to the people for a while. I felt sort of dreamy, as though I loved the whole world. And then, afterward—" she laughed a little shyly "—I liked them all less than ever. There must have been something queer in it."

Clayton's first thought was delight at the girl's entire ingenuousness. But a moment later the full significance of her words came to him and he realized that here might be the clue for which he had been searching for so long.

"How extraordinary!" he laughed. "But are you sure that it was the tea and not just a sudden mood?"

His companion shook her head.

"No," she answered, positively, "I know the sort of mood you mean. But this was something much more distinct and engrossing. Why, for a little while, everything seemed to expand or contract in the queerest way. I'm afraid I can't explain very well. But everything there—all the people and even the things in the room—seemed to have delightful and wonderful qualities and—I'm afraid that doesn't sound very coherent?" she broke off, laughing.

"It is quite coherent," Clayton responded; "though strange enough, surely. But—" he broke off and looked into her eyes.

"But what?"

He was silent a moment. "But I wonder—" he went on "—whether I

might become socially impossible for a moment and say something serious?"

The lovely eyes met his in frank surprise and inquiry.

"—and I wonder whether that sort of thing is good for one?" he finished.

She laughed. "That's not very serious, Mr. Clayton. No, I don't suppose that sort of thing is at all good for one. But you New Yorkers do not make that a criterion of your actions, surely?"

"Perhaps we do not!" he answered gravely.

"But that's no reason why I shouldn't?" she demanded, smiling. "There you go, trying to keep all the privileges for yourselves. I think I like New York and I want lots of privileges!"

Clayton laughed. "Do you expect to be here long?"

"About a month, I think."

"Well, you ought to see about enough of New York in that time. And I hereby extend you the freedom of the city with all its privileges. But I hope you will extend me one in return?"

At this moment her Aunt bustled up to them. "Natalie, my dear, you must come and meet the Jordans. Such dear people and so unusual. Two of my best friends, you know."

Then she turned, beaming. "You will excuse us, Mr. Clayton?"

Miss Van Cleef rose gracefully to her feet. In spite of a little momentary trick of shyness now and then, she was clearly a young lady with a good deal of natural poise. She turned to Clayton for an instant, before following her aunt.

"And the boon you ask?" she inquired, laughing.

"Just to see something of you, while you are here," he answered, gravely.

Again the lovely eyes met his in surprise. He tried to make his glance express nothing more than a friendly interest, but a little of his growing wonder and admiration showed for an instant.

"Natalie!" her aunt called her, a little impatiently.

The girl colored adorably and dropped her eyes. "I—why, of course, if you—wish it," she murmured.

An instant later she had joined her aunt.

Clayton stood still, conscious of quickening pulses. And for an instant he forgot his mission there and the work he had set himself to do, and became enmeshed in a day-dream, full of vague thoughts and fancies, leading he knew not whither.

But not for long. In the middle of a discussion on Freud, Mrs. Furneau moved passed him with a smile that held something of meaning in it and he looked up to see her welcoming a tall woman, strikingly handsome, whose face he recognized at once.

But he should not have recognized her if her face had not been engraved on his memory by the force of association with tragedy. For he remembered Mrs. Fawcette as an ultra-conservative, conventional woman—a woman who was socially powerful and knew it—and one whose speech and attire were as conservative as her views. And now!

She wore a long, flowing "Art" gown of the most amazing shade of orange fading into lavender. She wore long green earrings, hanging nearly to her shoulders. Her chestnut hair, once so beautifully coiffured, now escaped in wisps from beneath her big, flopping hat, and from her head to her heels, she was "of Art, Arty!"

But after a second glance Clayton realized that the change in her attire was perhaps not the most striking change after all. The handsome face was still hard—still held something of dominance in its level glance—but the mouth had sagged a little; there were heavy lines under the eyes, and the eyes themselves were less clear.

The whole face had deteriorated. It

was much like approaching a house, handsome in the distance, only to find it deserted and falling into ruins on closer inspection.

As a portrait painter, Clayton had naturally studied faces. But he had never before seen so great a change in a face, without a definite cause to which the change could be ascribed. It was not a good face, at all events, of that, he was very certain.

Mrs. Furneau smilingly signed to him to join her, and he was presently shaking hands with Mrs. Fawcette. Her manner was most cordial, but he did not feel that she was particularly glad to see him.

"I hear you have been round the world, since last we met," he told her.

"Oh, no! Just a fairly long stay in Egypt, a little off the beaten track."

"What enthusiasm!" Clayton remarked. "Life is a poor shabby thing at best—so I don't see that it matters much where we spend it. But I dare say you enjoyed yourself?"

Mrs. Fawcette had found a seat on a sofa while they were talking and he sat down beside her without an invitation.

"Oh, yes, thank you, I enjoyed myself," she answered a little sharply.

"How extraordinary!" Clayton exclaimed. "I thought that faculty was—dead, in most of us."

She turned and stared at him, suspiciously. "Well, it isn't dead in me, at all events!" she snapped; "although your remarks might imply that you think it ought to be!"

Clayton was secretly delighted to find that she had so quick a temper. For he hoped that reaction might loosen her tongue, if there was anything to learn from her.

He sat up as though stung. "My dear lady, I had no thought of implying any such thing. If my words sounded discourteous I beg that you will pardon them. To tell you the truth, you may remember that I suffered a terrible loss

some months ago and I'm afraid that that has made me self-centred as well as costing me my own capacity for enjoyment. You remember?"

It seemed to him that his companion started slightly, and for an instant his heart stood still with a sudden fierce hope. But she answered smoothly enough:

"You poor man, of course I remember it. But surely you found your sister again? I have been away, you see, and—"

He shook his head. "No, I never found her—and now I am trying to forget."

He glanced at his companion, but she was looking down at her hands. "You have stopped trying to find her?" she inquired, without looking up.

"What is the use?" he replied.

There was a moment's silence.

Then:

"I think, perhaps, you are wise!" she said. "After all, she probably ran away with someone and is quite happy." She looked up at him, at last. "And I am sure you will regain your capacity for enjoyment."

Her glance lingered a moment and for the first time he became aware of a queer fascination of which she seemed to have the power. She was undoubtedly a handsome woman and her long, narrow eyes could express a great deal, in a queer, elusive way.

"I feel that I am regaining it, momentarily," he answered.

He could have taken her and cheerfully choked her, for the callous way in which she had referred to his sister, fascination or no fascination, but that would not have advanced his cause any. He was beginning to be suspicious of everyone, and Mrs. Fawcette had been one of the last persons to see Margaret.

She smiled into his eyes then, a strange, elusive smile that was yet vaguely repellant.

"You are pleased to be facetious," she said.

"Indeed, no. Of all interests, a human interest is the keenest. And when that interest is beautiful—" he sighed.

He felt her hand touch his for a fleeting instant. "Come," she answered, "you must not flirt with me on such short acquaintance!" But she smiled into his eyes.

"And when our acquaintance is not so short?" he demanded.

She rose to her feet and Clayton rose too and faced her. "If you will permit me to lengthen it," he added.

She laughed provocatively. "Why, then we shall see what we shall see," she answered.

She left him then and presently he took leave of his hostess and came away. He had learned little or nothing from Mrs. Fawcette or anyone. But he was not ill-pleased with his afternoon. For at least he had paved the way for a closer acquaintance with that rather dangerous-looking lady. And he had learned something of interest from the Girl in Gray.

Clayton's pulse quickened again reminiscently at the thought of the girl in gray, but he shook himself impatiently. Such things and such thoughts were not for him—until he had solved his problem and had found Margaret.

Larry met him at his door, in high excitement. "Sure, 'tis glad I am, you're back agin, sor. That there private phone's been ringing like mad fer the last hour. Ivery minute, Misther Moore wants to know are ye back yit. He must have something important to tell ye, sor. There! There it goes again."

Clayton gave his hat, stick and gloves to Larry and hurried into his bedroom. Yes, the tiny phone bell was ringing faintly.

"Hello, Moore? This is Clayton. You want me?"

"At last," came Moore's voice over

the wire; "you bet I want you. Clayton, I believe we're on the right track at last!"

"How's that?"

"You remember my telling you about the young drunk I met up on Riverside Drive last night."

"Of course!"

"Well, I went up to his place this afternoon — on West Forty-fourth Street—and found everything at sixes and sevens. There were a lot of young fellows of his type hanging around in the flat, to say nothing of three or four peroxide blondes. His man was nearly in tears. . . .

"It seems this chap can't be found. He didn't come home at all last night and they haven't heard from him. In short, he has disappeared. He had dates with a lot of them for the morning and afternoon and evening, and one of the beauties remarked tearfully that it wasn't like Jimmy to break a date with a bit of fluff. But there it is. He's gone. His valet was just about to get in touch with the police when I left."

"What do you make of it?"

"I'll tell you, Clayton. Of course I may be wrong. The young rip may have been worse soused than he looked and may be sobering up in some local police station. But I don't think it was that. I didn't like the way the other fellow looked at him in the cloak-room last night, while he was talking about that party. The young fellow didn't like it either. And he told me that he had been forbidden to talk about that party. I think that had something to do with his disappearance. Of course, all this is only guess-work, but it looks queer, doesn't it?"

"Well," Clayton answered, "if he disappeared because he talked at that party, and he disappeared last night, the people he offended and who gave the party must be fast workers."

"That's just it. If he has disappeared

completely and doesn't turn up, I think that's the most probable explanation. And only a well-organized gang could work that fast. So it may be the same gang."

"What about the other fellow? Did you trace him?"

"The man who overheard us? Yes. But I haven't had a chance to talk to him or get acquainted yet. His name is Vining, as I thought; he's a young doctor, with independent means. I guess he's a better cocktail mixer than a surgeon. Has an office in West End Avenue. They say he limits his cases to attractive women. But everyone agrees that he is clever.

"I hope he's not too clever for us!" Clayton answered. "But we can't tell much about it until we see whether the young drunk turns up or not. What do you think?"

"Well," Moore answered, "I hate to lose time, but I suppose it's no use jumping to conclusions. What's your news?"

Clayton told him what had happened that afternoon, including the clue he believed he had found, in the description of the tea which the Girl in Gray had been given.

Finally they agreed to follow each his own line for the present, always keeping the other informed of the progress made. Indeed, there was little else they could do as yet.

CHAPTER VIII

The Strange Tea

IN spite of the promise of recent events and the possible clues which Moore and Clayton believed they had found, the next three weeks were uneventful. Uneventful, that is, from the standpoint of their quest, though eventful enough to Clayton personally.

He was a languid and cynical guest at many highbrow and lowbrow gatherings. He discussed Turgeneff, spiritual-

ism, psycho-analysis, free love, and so forth at the one until his ears burned; and polo, prize-fighting, women, politics and stocks at the other. But he unearthed no fresh clues.

He did make a little progress, however.

For one thing, he cultivated the acquaintance of Mrs. Fawcette until it ripened into something much more intimate, though vague and undefined.

She was, he found, an interesting woman, well-traveled and well-read and, better still, with very definite views on most things. She had a clever gift of repartee, as he learned to his cost, for he found himself several times considerably beyond his depth.

Her views were strikingly, glaringly liberal, and she seemed to take a secret delight in attempting to shock him—and she succeeded better than she guessed.

But he got no news from her.

However, he formed a real friendship during those three weeks—a friendship that meant far more to him, however little it might mean to his quest.

For he arranged a second opportunity to meet and talk with the Girl in Gray, as he liked to call her. And after that he obtained her permission and that of her aunt, to call upon them.

After that call and a theater party that he gave for them, they were good friends. It was his play-time, before the serious part of his quest began, and it meant more to him than he could express.

Natalie Van Cleef took her many social experiences and the many strange specimens she met with a ready sympathy and a sweet reserve that were inspiring to watch. She was welcome everywhere, as much for her lovely personality as for her beauty, but somehow she contrived to be a welcome addition to each circle without being exactly of it.

She was essentially innocent without being ignorant, so that the unconventional moods and tenses with which she

came into contact left her comprehending, at least in part, and yet quite untouched in her own sweet, calm and slightly shy personality.

To Clayton, during those days, she was like a breath of sea air in a crowded department-store, or a bunch of roses on a tramp steamer. Before many days had passed, she filled most of his waking thoughts and many of his dreams.

They saw a great deal of each other and had many happy days together, days so happy—at least to Clayton—that he could never think of them without a catch in the throat and a tightening of the hands, in view of what came after.

For, as their friendship ripened, he grew to realize that her mind and spirit were as sweet and lovely and gracious as her person.

Moore accomplished little more than Clayton did, during those three weeks. The young fellow from whom he had obtained his first hint of a circle of drug-takers *de luxe* had in truth disappeared. Being a wealthy young man of considerable social position, his disappearance became a nine-days' wonder. But for all that, no trace of him was found.

Moore and Clayton decided that their first surmise—his lack of reticence that night—had been the cause of his disappearance.

Moore did, however, get in touch with young Dr. Vining, who had overheard that conversation, and after a while succeeded in making his acquaintance.

Vining apparently took to him at once, and when Moore carelessly mentioned the fact that he had independent means, Vining contrived to see a good deal of him, aided and abetted by Moore himself.

Once or twice, Moore vaguely skirted the subject of his conversation with the young fellow who had disappeared, but Vining displayed a bland ignorance of any such conversation or of any place

where such a party as the young man had described could be found.

However, Moore did not despair, but continued to cultivate the friendship, in his effeminate and lackadaisical way, until presently Vining knew all about his passion for new and outlandish sensations.

But events were shaping themselves for both Clayton and Moore during those weeks. The end of their period of inactivity came suddenly, and at the same time to both.

A few days before Natalie planned to leave New York, Mrs. Furneau arranged a little luncheon to which Clayton was invited. Among others, the luncheon included Mrs. Fawcette.

Clayton spent a trying two hours. He had fallen almost unconsciously into the habit of being very much himself when Natalie and he were alone together, and his change of manner, when talking to Mrs. Fawcette and to Mrs. Furneau, must have been striking.

He caught Natalie looking at him once or twice in a puzzled way, during the luncheon, but so far as the quest was concerned, it would have been more costly to strike a false or inconsistent note in the ears of the older women than in the ears of Natalie.

So Clayton was forced to carry on a miserably cynical, disillusioned and world-weary conversation with his hostess and Mrs. Fawcette, sick at heart all the time at the half-concealed surprise in Natalie's eyes.

It was a little better after luncheon, however. He contrived with some difficulty to have a word or two with Natalie away from the others. They had always been frank with each other and this conversation was no exception, although she was just a little cool at first.

"I'm—I'm very, very sorry that you are going away," he said to her.

"Are you? I should not imagine that anything would have the power to make

you either very, very sorry or very, very glad."

"Natalie!"

She looked down for a moment and when she looked up again she was her usual friendly, frank self. "Well, then, why do you talk in that disillusioned way? It isn't a bit like you."

Clayton was silent. Then, taking a wild leap in the dark, he tried to be equally frank, whatever the consequences.

"Natalie, I know it isn't like me. It isn't even a real side of me. But I had to do it today as I have had to do it before. There is a real and vital reason. And that is all I can tell you. Do you believe me?"

She looked up, laughing. Then, as her eyes met his, her smile faded into a look of wonder. "Do you really mean that?" she demanded.

"I really mean just that," he assured her earnestly. "And I really mean that I simply cannot tell you any more than that."

"But—but—why, that is absurd! Why can't you be yourself?"

He shook his head, despairingly. "Natalie, I have told you the truth. And our friendship means far too much to me for me to lie to you, of all people. But I cannot tell you any more than that!"

She stared at him for a moment or two, and then he realized what a really wonderful girl she was. For her hand went out impulsively to his sleeve and the eyes she raised to his were full of sincerity.

"I believe you, then," she said, simply; "and your reason does not matter."

He must have let some of his appreciation show in his eyes, for she flushed a delicious pink and dropped her own quickly. He leaned a little nearer to her:

"And you see I can still be very, very glad about something!" he told her.

She changed the subject, rather hastily.

"Do you remember my telling you about some wonderful tea I had had, just before our first meeting?" she asked.

Clayton hastened to assure her that he did remember; that they had discussed that tea several times and wondered about its peculiar properties.

"Well, Mrs. Fawcette has promised me some more of it, and she is taking me there this afternoon!"

"To the same place?" Clayton asked.

Her words filled him with a vague apprehension, perhaps because by now he hated the thought of associating her closely with anything that had to do with his quest.

"Yes, to the same place. *Now* what's the matter?" she added, laughing.

"Well," he answered, "frankly, I hate the thoughts of your taking drugs of any kind, however mild. You don't belong in that crowd, Natalie."

She laughed. "Oh, but I must have some more of that tea, if only to convince myself that there was nothing in it and that my queer *mood* was only a mood."

"Well, if you *must* go there, I wish you'd let me go with you! I know it's a funny request and I don't quite know why I don't want you to go there without me—but I don't!"

Clayton felt very young and awkward with that speech. But there was so little that he could tell her to warn her. And he did *not* trust either Mrs. Fawcette or her friends.

Natalie looked up at him, curiously.

"You are in a funny mood today," she said; "but if you want to come along, I should think Mrs. Fawcette would be delighted to take you!"

Before he could answer, she had turned to that lady.

"Mrs. Fawcette," she called, gaily. "Mr. Clayton is dying to come to the tea

with us this afternoon. Do you suppose you could manage to take him?"

Then Clayton saw a queer thing happen. Mrs. Fawcette turned as though she had been stung and glanced first at him and then at Natalie, with a scarcely veiled intensity that left them startled in their turn. She did not answer for a moment, and Natalie was driven into further speech:

"I've been telling him about that wonderful tea we had there before and he wants to come along and sample it. But if you'd rather not—" She glanced from Mrs. Fawcette to Clayton, in obvious embarrassment.

Clayton thought Mrs. Fawcette had grown rather pale, but she answered rapidly enough:

"You bad girl! I told you not to talk about that tea, or our host will be swamped with people coming to sample it and demanding where he got it. But if Mr. Clayton wants to come with us, I shall be delighted to include him in the party, and he can see you home afterward."

There was an almost venomous light in her eyes as she spoke. But if Natalie saw it she appeared serenely unconscious of the fact.

"Thank you," she answered. "And I'm awfully sorry if I should not have talked to him about it."

Naturally Clayton did not feel very comfortable about his position in the party, but he was determined to go, and so made no demur to his left-handed invitation. And later, when they found themselves in Mrs. Fawcette's car on the way to her friend's house, she seemed to wish to make amends by being very cordial to both. But Clayton did not much relish the look in her eye when it fell on Natalie, all the same.

Their host was a Russian, an aristocrat and a card from the fallen house of cards that had been Russia, carried by

the wind of that fall into a new country and a new circle.

Unlike most Russian aristocrat refugees, however, he seemed to have plenty of means. The house, just off Fifth Avenue in the Eighties, was beautifully if somewhat barbarically furnished, with a queer mixture of Occidental comfort in the shape of deep lounges and arm chairs, and of Oriental splendor in many and rich hangings and cushions.

The air of his rooms was heavy with perfume and the man himself, with his pale skin, deep-set eyes and pointed beard, gave an impression of something equally exotic. They were the only guests and he welcomed them with almost effusive cordiality, Clayton included.

After a few moments of general conversation, Mrs. Fawcette rose to her feet, smiling.

"Droga," she called to him—he was talking to Natalie—"I have brought something to show you. I am sure that the young people will excuse us for a moment!"

Before Clayton had recovered from his amused surprise at the somewhat crude method of classifying him with Natalie, Ivanovitch, our host, had risen to his feet with a smile and a bow and followed Mrs. Fawcette through a pair of heavy curtains into a room beyond.

"Well!" laughed Natalie. Then her smile faded and she touched his arm. "But I'm glad you came," she whispered. "I don't think I like it here very much. I thought there was going to be a lot of people. At least, I thought that was what Mrs. Fawcette said."

"Natalie, dear," Clayton whispered. "Don't come here again without me! Promise?"

He was very much in earnest and the "dear" slipped out before he knew it, but fortunately she did not seem to notice it.

"You are growing very dictatorial, sir!" she answered. "But all the same

I don't believe I do like it here. I'm glad you came."

A moment later the curtains parted and the others rejoined them. There was nothing to be learned from their host's expression, for his face was a beautiful blank. But Clayton thought Mrs. Fawcette bore traces of either temper or fear, and possibly both.

But that was all that happened. They had tea—and it was wonderful tea. But it was just tea and nothing more, of that he was certain. The conversation was general and interesting enough, and if Natalie was disappointed she naturally could not show it.

Clayton laid himself out to be both sympathetic and entertaining to the Russian. The moment came when he felt justified in asking him to lunch the following day. Ivanovitch accepted readily enough. If there was anything to be learned from him, Clayton was determined to make an attempt to learn it. And he believed that Natalie's first statement about the tea was correct. She was exceedingly healthy and not given to violent moods.

Afterward, Mrs. Fawcette had to hurry home to dress for a dinner engagement and Clayton took Natalie back to her aunt's house.

When their taxi pulled up in front of the house it was nearly dinner-time and both had engagements. But Clayton detained the girl for a moment longer.

"Listen, Natalie! Will you do me a very big favor?" he asked her as they mounted her aunt's steps.

She threw him a smiling glance of inquiry.

"It is a big favor," he warned her. "And this is it: Will you promise to tell me before you go there again for any more of that wonderful tea?"

Natalie looked at him in wonder. "How funny you are today," she said at last. "Don't you like Mrs. Fawcette or Ivanovitch?"

"Not very much, I confess. But I like the idea of that drugged tea even less, Natalie. Promise, please!"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I've got to go and dress, you importunate man," she laughed. "So—I'll promise. Though I haven't the slightest idea why I should."

At all events, Clayton went down her aunt's front steps, treading on something much less substantial.

CHAPTER IX

The Amateur Burglar

AFTER seeing Natalie home from the tea at the Russian's, Clayton had gone to a dinner and theater party, and had not reached his own flat until the small hours.

Nevertheless, he found Larry waiting up for him, with the news that Moore wanted to speak to him the moment he came in.

Moore answered at once, when Clayton rang him.

"Listen, old fellow," he said. "There's some really big news for you. I have had another talk with Vining. I took him out to dinner last night and gave him a really good time and I think he has thawed out at last. At any rate, he admitted that he could take me to a wonderful party if he wanted to.

"I had told him," Moore went on, "that my one object in life was a new and unique sensation, and of course when he admitted that he could give me one, I devilled the life out of him to do it. Well, Clayton, he finally consented!"

"Great stuff!"

"I wanted to go tomorrow night, but he couldn't manage that. He's going out of town tomorrow. However, he promised to take me the night after. That's Friday night. But I am to be blindfolded, to travel in a closed car, and to

pay two hundred dollars for the privilege. Pretty steep, eh?"

"It ought to be *some* party," Clayton remarked.

"You'd think so!" Now I've been thinking the thing over and I can't believe that a gang like that will give me the slightest chance to learn where I am going or how I got there. They couldn't afford to. And they're probably too clever to fool. . . .

"That leaves two other courses open to us: We can try to find out before hand approximately where they are going, and you can pick me up on the way and follow on. Or you can attempt to follow me from the start. But if they are the clever rogues I think they are, the latter will not be easy."

"Nor the former, for that matter," Clayton remarked.

"Perhaps not," Moore replied; "but now that we know definitely that Vining is mixed up with *some* gang, even if it isn't the one we are looking for, I think we can take more definite steps to find out more about him. And he's to be away tomorrow afternoon."

"Search his rooms?"

"Exactly! What do you say?"

"Do you think he's at all suspicious of you, Moore?"

There was silence for a moment. Then Moore's voice came more slowly over the wire:

"Damn it, Clayton, I can't be sure. Of course, he seems perfectly friendly now. But he did change a bit suddenly. However, that's probably only my imagination."

"Well, I don't believe that it's worth while your taking a chance of running foul of him. Did he tell you of his own free will that he was going out of town tomorrow?"

"Yes; made quite a point of it. But, of course, I was disappointed at not going to the party sooner."

"Well, if he's at all suspicious of you,

and if he's as clever as you say he is, maybe he's counting on your doing that very thing!"

"What? Searching his rooms? Clayton, you've got a head on you!"

"It's just possible," he answered; "so I think it would be better if I go. Then if I'm caught, he'll take me for a burglar and not suspect you necessarily. I'll take Larry with me, and if they're planning to surprise me, maybe I'll give them a surprise in return. Besides, if he does try to ambush me, we'll know that he is suspicious of you."

Moore agreed to this plan, if rather reluctantly, and gave Clayton Vining's address. He told him, also that he thought he was being followed. They discussed this rather disturbing news for a while, then rang off.

The next morning Clayton summoned Larry.

"Go to one of the theatrical make-up stores in the West Forties this afternoon," he said, "and get two masks. Then clean up your kit of tools. Then go to Vining's house and look over the lay of the land. He lives on the second floor." He told him the address.

"Finally, Larry," he added, "meet me with your kit at Fifty-ninth Street and Lexington Avenue at nine o'clock tonight and do *not* bring a gat. If we're going to have to injure anyone, we've got to do it quietly. We can't afford any kind of publicity. That's all, Larry."

An hour later Natalie and Clayton were riding in the Park and for a few hours he forgot his quest.

Perhaps Clayton will be accused of lack of feeling for that. But he loved and longed for his little sister none the less because Natalie had come into his life.

Clayton had led a curiously uneventful life up to that time, aside from his experiences in the war. His knowledge of women was limited to social ameni-

ties and books; the light loves of the average young sower of wild oats had never appealed to him. So he had to struggle against a very torrent of longing and emotion now that he had met Natalie.

For he was wildly, hopelessly in love with her. They had known each other for only three weeks, but the thing had come on him like a very flash of revelation and was unmistakable and not to be denied.

They say that women are aware of these things. If she knew that Clayton loved her, Natalie did not show it by word or look.

She was very lovely that morning. The sun vied with the wind in tormenting Clayton by playing hide and seek in her wayward masses of hair. Her beautiful face radiated health and happiness, so that passersby turned and watched her brazenly.

Ever the lovely eyes looked into his, clear, innocent and friendly, until laughter and badinage died on his lips and he rode beside her tongue-tied and almost blind with longing to take her into his arms, there in the sunlight, and tell her that she meant the past, the present, the future and all life to him.

Perhaps she guessed. For she talked on at random and more rapidly than usual, until he recovered some show of casual companionship.

At her door she left him with lowered eyes and only a faint "Good-by," so that he left her house happier than he had ever been in his life.

By the time Clayton had bathed and dressed for his lunch with Ivanovitch, something of the mood of the morning had passed and he was back in the spirit of his quest again.

He called for the Russian in his little car and took him to an inn out on the Peekskill road. It is a beautiful place, that inn, and the Russian enjoyed himself, although Clayton could not supply

him with anything to match his wonderful tea.

Clayton had schooled himself in a line of subtly degrading conversation to spring on Ivanovitch, and he discovered that the Russian followed his lead with extraordinary alacrity.

In his subtle and charming way, Ivanovitch gave vent to a series of the nastiest remarks Clayton had ever listened to. He felt that it would have been a real pleasure to throw him over the balcony of the inn, into the gorge, some fifty feet below.

Clayton did his best to convince the Russian he shared his views and his tastes. He took a leaf from Moore's book and admitted that he had run the entire gamut of sensations with the exception of drugs, and that he was too lazy to go in search of those.

Finally he admitted quite frankly that he had heard of some wonderful tea that had been served at his house, and begged him to tell whether it was really as captivating as it had been called.

But Ivanovitch was cautious. He told Clayton he had had some of that tea the preceding afternoon, and that it was merely good tea.

So Clayton let the matter drop entirely and talked about Russia and other general subjects until it was time to take him home.

At his door, however, he tried once more. "Well, monsieur, I hope you will give me another opportunity to enjoy your society. You are a man of the world. And I hope that if you run across something new in this weary round of nights and days, you will let me share it with you!"

Ivanovitch bowed, smiling his cynical smile. "Who knows, perhaps I may yet be able to introduce you to a new sensation, my dear Mr. Clayton."

And with that, they parted.

There had been something about his smile that Clayton did not entirely like.

But he felt that if the Russian knew anything about the famous revels, of which they were beginning to learn, he had made a fair start to learn more through him.

The real event of the day began when Clayton met Larry at nine o'clock. He was at the appointed place promptly and his master could see by his slightly increased girth that he had brought his kit of tools with him.

Clayton was dressed in his oldest clothes and looked as much like a burglar as possible, so that, if Vining saw him, he would not connect him with Moore or think it more than a coincidence.

Vining's house was one of those high, narrow brownstone fronts in the Sixties. He lived alone, and his apartment was cared for by a woman who came in by the day.

Once Larry and Clayton reached his rooms, they were in little danger of detection. But the difficulty was forcing the lock on the front door, without attracting attention.

Vining lived on the second floor. His windows were dark. But there were lights in the apartment on the first floor although there were none in the basement, so that they were in constant danger of detection as they stood in the little entrance.

However, Larry began fishing under his coat and calmly made ready to force the lock. Clayton was uncomfortable. This was taking the law into their own hands with a vengeance—and if they were caught, Clayton could not take the law into his confidence. Then, too, if anyone came along while they were searching Vining's rooms and saw the forced lock, there would be a hullabaloo at once.

"Wait a minute, Larry," said Clayton, "there are some children coming. I've got a better idea, I think."

There were letter-boxes for each apartment in the vestibule and a push-

button underneath each letter-box. They stood quietly waiting until the children had come, laughing and calling, nearly opposite them, then Clayton pressed all the bells.

They waited a moment and then, sure enough, heard the latch lifted.

"Quick, Larry!" Clayton whispered, "put something into the door to hold it open!"

He slipped one of his tools under the door at the bottom, so that the latch could not close again, and then drew back into the shadow of the steps next door.

They waited a few moments and presently heard a window raised overhead. The children were still calling in the street and a woman's voice floated down to them, faintly: "Drat those children!" Then the window was closed with a bang.

Larry drew closer to his master. "Say, have you done this before, sor?" he demanded.

They waited for perhaps ten minutes. But nothing happened and no one came to the front door, either from inside the house or from the street.

Then Larry slipped quietly forward, pushed open the door, picked up his jimmy and stood waiting. "Come on, sor," he whispered, "'tis now or never!"

Clayton followed him into the house.

He had told Larry that there was just a possibility either that some one might be waiting for them or Vining might return and catch them. On that account, Clayton had arranged that they should not stick together after they got into the apartment, but that Larry should drop behind a little, and, as soon as he was inside, to hide somewhere where he could watch his master, to act, if necessary, as surprise reinforcements.

What Clayton had heard of Vining had made him skeptical as to the ease with which his rooms could be searched.

especially if there were anything there for him to conceal.

There was a light in the entrance hall, but everything was quiet. The two men passed through it and up the first flight of stairs. Clayton's heart was in his mouth. However, the stairs creaked hardly at all and they reached the dark hall one flight up, with very little noise.

Larry had called with a parcel for an imaginary tenant, earlier in the evening, and had not only marked in his memory the stairs that creaked, but had also ascertained that Vining's door would be comparatively simple to open.

As it lessened the chance of people coming in and catching them, they mounted the second flight at once. They were in pitch darkness, and the necessity for speed coupled with the need for making absolutely no sound had keyed up Clayton, the amateur burglar, to a pretty high pitch.

They were half-way up the second flight, on their hands and knees fortunately, and just maneuvering a creaky step, when a door opened in the hall below, letting out a flood of light.

Fortunately, it came from a chandelier high up in the room beyond and did not reach the spot where they stood. But it was nervous work, standing, or rather crouching, with one knee in the air, while the woman put out her light, locked the door and proceeded down the stairs to the front entry.

A moment later they stood in pitch darkness in front of Vining's door and donned their masks.

Clayton waited while Larry stooped down. He heard a little scraping sound, a chink as of metal striking metal, and then a sharp crack, that sounded as loud as a big gun in the silent hall.

They stood still for a moment, but nothing happened.

"There you are, sor," came Larry's cheerful whisper. "You go ahead and I'll foller and hide."

So, with a little electric torch in one hand and the other held out blindly before him, Clayton crept into the darkness that was, presumably, Vining's entrance hall.

After a moment, he heard the front door close softly behind him and then ventured to use the torch.

Have you ever gone into a strange house and tried to make out the lay of the land with a pocket torch? The torch shows up only one tiny spot at a time, and when you have swept it all over one article of furniture and made out its general dimensions, you have forgotten everything else!

However, Clayton found his way through the tiny hall and into a room on the left that appeared to be a sitting-room. It was dimly lit with a faint radiance that filtered in from the street below, and he was able to make out the distribution of the furniture.

One of the first things he noticed was a desk in the far corner by the window and he decided that was his goal. Larry was still at his heels.

"Open up that desk, Larry," he whispered. A moment later he heard the snap of the lock. "Now follow me while we search the rest of the place first." They went back into the tiny, pitch-dark hall.

The front door was at right angles to the outside hall. The little entrance hall was also at right angles to the outside hall and ended almost at once in an alcove with a sofa and some chairs in it.

But they found that another and narrower hall, the entrance to which was hidden by a heavy curtain, passed back, inside the flat, for its entire length. The dining-room, kitchen, bathroom and two bedrooms led off it in turn, and the hall ended in a window at the back of the house. A third bedroom lay to the right of the hall at the back. As it was a corner house, all these rooms had windows.

They found nothing of any importance to search. There was no one in the apartment—that was certain.

A great deal relieved, Clayton returned to the front hall, stationed Larry in the alcove there, and made his way to Vining's desk in the front room. To his disappointment, there was very little in the desk. A few old letters, an invitation or two, some receipts and a couple of blank income-tax return forms were all that his first search revealed.

But, having come there with so much difficulty, Clayton was determined to find something. And, going through the desk more carefully a second time, he did discover something that might be of value. It was a tiny account book, hidden in a little hollow under the desk-blottor.

Clayton studied it for a moment there in the silence, by the aid of his little torch, and presently received a shock. For it was half full of names, and these names included several persons he knew! After each name was a series of dates, followed by single figures, so that a single entry read something like this:

Emily Horton—August 11.2
August 15.3
August 17.2

(To be continued in the August 15 number)

Suddenly there was a tiny sound from the hall outside and Clayton instinctively switched off his torch and slipped the little book into his pocket. He turned toward the doorway, which lay in shadow. Then he became conscious that his heart was pounding heavily, for he could see that something was moving in the shadowy corner—

"Hands up!"

Clayton blinked in a glare of blinding light, from the suddenly illuminated chandelier. His hands were high above his head, and he was staring into the unwavering muzzle of a large and efficient looking automatic.

The owner of the gun stood just inside the doorway, with two other men, flanking him on either side. They looked a very determined and formidable trio.

In the pause that followed, Clayton had time to recognize Vining, from Moore's description, as the man with the gun. He also had time to wonder what had become of his reinforcements in the shape of Larry.

Obviously, the next move was in either Larry's hands or Vining's, for Clayton was effectually covered.

Then Vining snapped:

"Drop one hand and take off that mask!"



A Revolting Deed

By Elmer J. Williams

SHE lies at my feet crushed.

After all, it was not so hard to do. She drove me to a blind, unreckoning madness. . . . My God, her voice! Morning and night the same words, the same monotonous accents. I will never hear them again, but it seems that they will echo through my memories forever. I am glad the deed is done.

And yet, I cannot go undetected. My wife will be enraged when she sees how I destroyed that phonograph record.



Misunderstood

By Edgar Daniel Kramer

HE met a pretty flapper;
Gave her the up and down,
And then leaned close to murmur:
"You look like Helen Brown."

She glanced at him quite startled;
"I hope that you're not right,"
She answered somewhat coldly—
"I look much worse in white."

She Who Hesitates—

By Dorothy Thomson



TWO long rows of girls, on opposite sides of mirror-topped dressing-tables. Towels covering careful curls, and fastened at the nape of the neck with safety-pins. Cold-cream in gobs, grease-paint in heavy coatings. Are these hideous, messy creatures the delightful damsels who will presently slither bonelessly upon the stage, chanting:

"Will you be my Lolly Pop?"

Sweet, luscious Lolly Pop?"

While your heart whirrs like an erratic alarm-clock?

It must be so, for here and there beauty is emerging in a cloud of perfumed powder, excess of which is dusted away with a soft baby-brush. Eyelashes are curled back with black mascara. Little fingers dipped in rouge make rosebuds of pretty mouths. One breathes with relief. Beauty had only been playing at hide-and-seek!

Chatter and staccato laughter, the rehashing of an old joke with a new insinuation. And in the middle of one row a very beautiful, very blonde girl with a wistful red mouth and quiet blue eyes.

"What's eatin' you, Nita?" demanded her neighbor to the left, and the two girls exchanged friendly glances.

They shared a rather shabby apartment together, and they were the two very prettiest girls in the entire chorus of a very popular musical *revue*. And Night and Day were not more different than Cherrie Bouchet and Nita Gilmore.

Cherrie's beauty was the sort that

struck with swift admiration because of its vividly arresting qualities: flashing black eyes, scarlet-splashed, tawny cheeks and bold, white teeth. But Nita's held you silent with its singular white perfection—delicate baby skin, absolute regularity of feature, and shining blonde hair.

"Nothing," replied Nita, soft of voice. "At least, I'll tell you after the show, Cherrie."

Cherrie thrust her with one of her swift rapier glances, then ducked her head to call to a late arrival, and Nita again lapsed into staring silence until a sharp nudge in her ribs made her jump and "Ouch!" Madge Sexton, big and vulgarly cheerful, grinned at her.

"Tryin' to tell your own fortune, baby? Starin' into your hands like they was full of prunes, or promises, or somethin'."

"I was thinking of a fairy-tale I heard when I was a kid," replied Nita diffidently. "About a fairy that offered a little girl a choice between a thousand years of youth and one day with all the power and wealth of the world in her hands."

Madge Sexton's eyes narrowed to understanding shrewdness.

"Which did she scrap?"

"That," said Nita, wrinkling her delicate brows, "I can't seem to remember."

"Holy Pat! Who wants to live a thousand years on this punk map? Say, if she was a wise kid, she ruled the Big Roost for her little day. You take my advice—" she tapped Nita's bare shoulder with a rather heavy forefinger

"—and catch old Anton, if you can." And with a flirt of laughter, half malicious, half good-humored, she was gone, leaving Nita staring after her with dizzy blue eyes.

II

THE following morning, the sun, inquisitive old bounder, stuck his nose between the carelessly drawn curtains of a certain apartment, and leered at the extravagant beauty before him. He dwelt with hot appreciation on Cherrie's full, scarlet lips, and then he caught a handful of Nita's fair hair and fingered its gold covetously.

The girls stirred restlessly. Cherrie gave a little sigh and swung a petulant arm across her eyes. But Nita awoke quietly and stared at the ugly bunches of purple grapes that grew on ugly yellow branches upon the ceiling and saw neither purple grapes nor yellow branches.

After a while, she raised her left hand that had hung limply over the side of her narrow white bed, and transferred her gaze to an affair of sapphires and diamonds and platinum lace-work, that adorned the third finger of her left hand. Holding it in the sun, she turned it from side to side, watching it twinkle and sparkle and wink, with the identical curiosity of a very small girl with a bit of broken glass.

A sudden gasp from the neighboring twin bed caused her to bury the hand abruptly beneath the covers, but Cherrie was not to be fooled.

"Nita Gilmore, you stick your guilty paw right over here, *pronto!* I wanta see! Golly! But the diamond blinds my blinkers. You oughta wear a veil over it, or something."

She sat up in bed, hugging her dimpled knees with her dimpled arms and staring frankly at her friend.

"No need to ask who's the unfortunate fiancé! Anton, of course!"

Nita nodded briefly.

"He's going to marry you?" asked Cherrie, with a touch of incredulity.

"He asked me to marry him."

"H-hum! Well, they say people get what they expect in this world. Mental suggestion, they call it. . . . How much is Anton worth?"

"A couple of million."

"Huh! How much do you weigh, Nita?"

"One hundred and fifteen. Why?"

"U-um! About eighteen thousand simoleons a pound. That's a good bargain, Nita."

Nita sat upright now, her face whiter than ever, and the pulse in her throat that always betrayed her every emotion, throbbing madly. Under her accusing stare, Cherrie continued:

"You and I saw a play once at the Grand—about some old bird that gave so many berries for so many lumps o' lard. Shylock, that's the egg's monniker. Well, that's what you're doin'. Tradin' your silk skin and honey hair to old Anton."

Nita laughed shortly. "I didn't know your morals permitted you to qualify as censor."

"They don't! But you're diff'rent from the rest of us, Nita, as chalk from cheese. You're a lamb among goats—scapegoats. Honest, maybe you think I'm nutty, but it's like putting a rose into a filthy claw."

Nita's usual sweet serenity was distinctly ruffled. She frowned as she again relaxed into her pillow. The sun had gone as quickly as it had come, and the glory of her diamond was dimmed.

"What do you know of Cutler Anton?"

"What do I know of any gray-haired goat that capers around with chorus girls! Well, he's a reg'lar pullet thief. And four or five of his ex-wives have shaken the shackles for various assorted reasons."

"But how," asked Nita, "does he differ from the other men we meet?"

Her even, silver voice was devoid of sarcasm, but Cherrie stared at her with a certain wonder.

"I've been taking stock of myself," continued Nita, eyes on the purple grapes. "And my only actual asset is beauty. I spent all my great-aunt's legacy in finding out I couldn't paint. Then, knowing I could sing a little, I thought maybe I could work up from the chorus into a star part, but now I see I can only sing and dance about average. Isn't that true, Cherrie?"

Cherrie hitched up a strap of lace over a tawny shoulder and wriggled her pink toes uncomfortably.

"But you're the prettiest kid in the whole blooming show. You—"

"But I won't always be. Perhaps I shall get like old Zita."

She shivered, and Cherrie looked at her in horror. Old Zita, toothless, evil-mouthed, a relic of a once famous and fêted actress, now sold the girls cigarettes, and certain of these cigarettes, it was whispered slyly, did not contain Turkish tobacco.

"When one hasn't any talent, and has only beauty," continued Nita, gravely, "one must marry young."

"Say, kid, you got a ninety-year-old head on nineteen-year shoulders. But, if you're keen on grabbin' some guy who'll give you a platinum hoop, why not annex young Wally Camp?"

Nita's answer was a flood of pink color that swept her forehead and apparently covered her pretty scalp. This confusion was promptly noted by the speculative Cherrie.

"I opine," grinned Cherrie, a bit maliciously, "that you are *beaucoup* cuckoo over our Wally. Don't shock my rose-pink ear with the info that Wally, also, has done the gallant goofer act and invited you to share his name and bank account."

"His name," smiled Nita faintly, "but not his bank account. His father says he will disinherit Wally if he marries out of his own set."

"Hell!" snorted Cherrie, vulgarly. She plastered a black curl about her forefinger thoughtfully. "His own set! Like people was dinner-plates, that had to be matched! An' you're not one of the hand-painted, gold-edged kind, only a sort of common little saucer with rose-buds scattered on it. But you wear well, kid. An' you're not willin' to take a chance with Wally?"

Nita's quick color had receded, leaving her cheeks pale again and the blue eyes seemingly two shades darker.

"I love Wally," she said honestly. "And my love would probably stand poverty, never having known anything else. But it's Wally I'm afraid of! He doesn't know how to make a living, and he would hate it, and he might get tired of me, then, and—oh, I couldn't bear that! Besides, he would be giving up everything for me!"

"Huh! You're one of them twenty-three thriller heroines, ain't you?"

Cherrie stretched, yawned pinkly, and out of a twirl and whirl of bedclothes, landed on her dainty toes on the rusty-looking carpet. "Well, I don't want a horn in on your affairs, Nita, but you take my advice and look before you leap. Lemme remind you of one thing, though:

"If you marry old Anton, you'll be his! You'll belong to him! Do you want his old hands to pet you? He ain't got no right to such a dainty young girl! Wally, now—he's clean! He's young! He's full of the devil, p'raps, but his eyes are bright and his mouth ain't so experienced. Think of that kissing and bekissed old mouth of old Anton's! Think of—"

"Oh, stop, stop, will you!"

Nita was erect in bed now, trembling

from head to foot with anger and disgust. A veil that she had so assiduously swung over Anton's past was being ruthlessly swept aside by Cherrie. And, looking into its stark ugliness was like leaning over the edge of a cliff and looking into a nest of hissing rattlesnakes. Hideous! Disquieting! Black and warning!

She thought of old Anton's hands—dry, cold, wrinkled, with a million tiny lines. She thought of the way they closed hard and completely over her own. And his gray eyes—cold, too. Greedily, avidly cold! And the mouth, sagging into a downward, satirical, knowing line! How many women, she wondered. . . .

"Well, excuse me for buttin' in," said Cherrie loftily, pattering into their bathroom, protesting with "ouches" at the feel of the cold linoleum. "But, take it from me, it's plenty and enough for a girl to marry a man she's awfully in love with!"

The door slammed. There was a sound of water gurgling into the bathtub, and Cherrie's contralto lilting in saucy song.

Nita's head was quiet on its pillow. The blue eyes brooded into space. The red mouth drooped with puzzled discontent.

Nita did not remove the shining pledge from her left hand, but she tucked that hand under her pillow so that it might not touch her cheek. Some women hate to open a door and look beyond.

Nita was trying to compromise with life—and love. And Nita was having a horribly hard time doing it.

III

WITHIN five minutes the phone bell had rung and Nita had risen on one elbow and stared at it as though it were an intruding gamin. However, urged

by Cherrie's, "Hi, there! Quit your dreamin' an' hand Central the soothin'-syrup!" she rose reluctantly, a lovely vision in trailing white, and put her pretty mouth to the transmitter.

"Yes?"

Cutler Anton's voice, *saue* as satin:

"Good morning, my little Rosebud. Am I rousing you too early?"

"Oh, no," she murmured. "Had to get up, anyway. There's a rehearsal at ten. A new song and dance to be introduced into the second act."

"But this afternoon! I thought you might tea with me at Wycherly's."

"I'm awfully sorry, Cutler, but I'm already dated. Perhaps tonight, after the show—"

"Tonight, then. And, Rosebud, I'm giving a little party Saturday night at Anton Vales, my country place, down the peninsula. You and Cherrie were there once, you remember, at a little affair? We will have an after-theater supper on Saturday night. I'll take some of you girls down in the limousine. Are you wearing my ring, Nita?"

"Cutler, I think I'd rather not wear it—in public—for a little while."

"How long will you keep me waiting, Rosebud?"

"Oh, not long," she said faintly, hand at suddenly pulsing throat.

"Well, *au revoir*, sweetheart! Save your kisses for me."

Save her kisses for him! Of course! She knew how the old *roué* wanted them! Hundreds of them, tight and quick on her rebellious red mouth.

Hanging up the receiver, she stood for a moment gripping with tight fingers the woodwork of the telephone, when the bell again buzzed sharply in her ear.

Wally Camp—gay and confident.

"Sweet Nita! Nearly forgot to tell you I'm going to whirl my girl about this p. m. in my new French car. Say,

she's a stunner, a Redion, eight-cylinder, of a blue to match your glorious optics."

Nita hesitated. "May Cherrie come, too?"

"No, Cherrie may not come, too," mimicked the irrepressible Wally. "What d'ye think I am? A Cook's tourist guide, or something? I'll call for my little eye-easer about three. Toodle-oo. Oh, and—Nita!"

"Yes?"—faintly.

"Love me?"

Silence, but it seemed as if he must hear Nita swallowing the fat lump in her throat. He laughed, low and exultantly, and hung up.

Cherrie entered from her bath, rosy and abundant.

"Datin' your human safe-deposit?"

"No, I'm going out with Wallace Camp."

Cherrie winked a wicked eye at the Cherrie in the mirror, and continued her song to the effect that "Twenty-two loves Twenty-two."

That afternoon, at three, Nita, in white polo coat and soft white hat, looked like a particularly pretty angel beside Wallace Camp, who looked a particularly likable young devil.

Gliding with costly smoothness along the wide boulevard, Wally was exuberant and Nita unwontedly still. He became curious, finally, at her lack of laughter, and stopping the car, he cradled her soft chin between his strong young hands, his laughing brown eyes plunging deep into her blue ones.

"I'll not carry a lovely carcass about in my blue Redion. Now then! What you miffed about?"

"Oh, nothing!" smiled Nita and allowed him to kiss her again and again upon the soft scarlet of her mouth and upon the little pulse that hammered so excitedly in her white throat. And it may be stated right here, that if Nita did not return his kisses, she welcomed them gorgeously. In fact, there was

little or nothing of the angel in Nita when Wally Camp's arms were about her and her head was close against his black-pearl cravat pin.

Finally, she asked him somewhere down in the middle of his shirt front:

"You want to marry me, don't you, Wally?"

"No coon ever loved a chicken," asserted Wally, "as I love you. And I'm willing to go the limit, Nita. I'll get a job as chauffeur or something. And you can start to burn the biscuits."

"I don't know anything about biscuits."

"You are so darned sweet, Nita," sighed Wally. "A man wouldn't dare do less than ask you to marry him, would he?"

"No," said Nita coldly, "he wouldn't dare do less."

Wally sighed again, uneasily.

"We'd better go home. I see clouds are gathering."

And on the return trip Nita did not slump softly on his shoulder, but sat up very erectly, quite by herself, like a cold little island.

IV

On Saturday night, a gay, exclaiming crowd of merry-makers assembled in the drawing-room of Cutler Anton's white Italian villa. This room, long-windowed, mirror-paneled, slowly filled to overflowing with noisy guests who tossed down countless priceless cocktails and shrieked their appreciation to the crystal chandeliers.

Wally Camp was disturbed and Nita was distressed to discover each other members of the party.

Wally had been rather mixing his drinks and was flushed and resentful. He looked over Nita's exquisite figure. Her frock was of golden silk that matched her hair, adorned with secretive splashes of blue that matched her eyes.

"Didn't know you went to Anton's parties! They're too noisy for a nice little girl like you, Nita."

Nita turned very hot and then extremely cold.

"But not too loud for you, of course."

"Don't be silly." Suddenly suspicion struck him and he regarded her narrowly. "Know Anton pretty well, don't you?"

And as if the name called him, Anton himself appeared, over-thin, yellow-skinned, sardonic, his gray eyes circling like coldly calculating vultures over the infinitely graceful curves and apple-blossom perfection of the girl.

A shudder swept her from head to foot. Could there be anything in the entire world worse than this cold, old passion of Cutler Anton?

"He looks at me," she thought restlessly, "as though I'd been made to order for him, like Louis makes his Berkshire Salad." And she would almost have hurled back his bargain into his mean eyes, had she not caught the suspicion of Wally's glance.

"My dear Rosebud," said Anton, silky-softly, "supper is waiting and I am going to take you in."

So she accepted his arm and marched straightly beside him, with not another glance for the disgruntled Wally Camp.

Around the oval dining-table ran a miniature track, and round and round the track speeded a marvelous little engine with its train of cars. The baggage cars were loaded high with Burgundy, French white wines and mellow old champagne, and were promptly raided with shrieks of laughter; but the mail car demanded the most curious attention. An envelope for every guest, and in every envelope a small, square card engraved in gold announcing the betrothal of Nita Gilmore to Cutler Anton.

In the immediate babel of laughter, exclamation and congratulation, Nita

turned to Anton, her face as white as the little card within her fingers.

"I didn't know you'd announce this—so soon!"

"And why not, darling?" Caressing words could become almost insulting epithets on his twisting lips. "Isn't April the proper month for fashioning future dreams? And June is the month of brides. Will you be ready, Rosebud? After all, why wait?"

Why wait, indeed! Surely this was bound to happen. She had been a vacillating fool!

Her blue eyes swept across the table and found Wally's horrified brown ones. All his flippancies had been stripped from him suddenly, like bright beads from a string. His head bent low, his gaze swept her face, imploring a denial of this atrocious, terrible joke. But the evident dismay of the wide blue eyes answered him sufficiently. The impossible was possible. And the incredible was true.

He drew a long breath. Then his hand closed upon the slender stem of his wine glass, and he flung its contents down his throat and turned a mechanical smile upon his insistent titian-haired neighbor.

He would have liked to have pushed back his chair and left the room. Left the house. Gone out somewhere in the dark quiet where he could digest this wretched and totally unexpected news. He felt rather absurdly grieved, like a small boy who has been playing with such a nice little bomb, and the bomb unkindly exploding, has knocked him silly and left him staring.

But to quit the big dining-room was, of course, impossible. A torrent of jokes and conjecture would have followed in his wake.

He wondered if Anton knew that he, Wally Camp, had been hard hit by Nita. But one could tell nothing from Fox-Face. The old boy had his eyes riveted

on the blonde beauty of the girl beside him. How exquisitely fair she was! His Lily-Girl he had often called her. Lily, indeed! He laughed shortly, and his titian-haired acquaintance pinched his elbow and demanded the "why."

"Say," she complained, "you're actin' like a reg'lar buckwheat. 'Fraid of strainin' your vocal cords? Who's the joke on?"

"Me," he told her. "What I thought was a lily turned out to be a marigold."

"You're drunk," she told him, and, crossing a powdered arm over his black coat-sleeve, she seized his glass of champagne and drained it dry. "I'm fond of doin' favors. Don't you lap up no more liquor tonight, old thing."

The dinner was a long torment. But all dinners end. This one ended with an elaborate, laughter-punctuated toast to the betrothed pair.

Wally's lips refused to drink it. Over his half-raised glass he met Nita's eyes. They looked sick.

"She's having a taste of her medicine," thought Wally, with hard exultation; "and there's more to come. What a pretty fool is Nita!"

He, too, stood to give a toast, his mouth wry and his eyes quick to catch Nita's instant shrinking.

"To the bride-to-be!" he cried boisterously. "To Nita, the lovely, the sweet, the charming! To Nita, the beautiful! To Beauty, then, the most potent thing in the world!—except, of course money."

To the ripple of amusement, Nita's cheeks stained pink and her eyes, which had been appealing, now turned darkly defiant.

V

A LIVELY negro orchestra was causing restless feet to scamper in the direction of the ballroom, and in the mêlée Wally, free to escape at last, was held back by

a soft little hand on his arm. He glanced down impatiently at Cherrie.

"Wait for me out on the terrace, Wally," she whispered. "By that privet hedge, near the goat-fellow blowing on a whistle. I got somethin' to tell you."

Wally looked down at the girl dully. He had always disliked Cherrie; resented Nita's friendship for this very blatant, vulgar young person. Her clothes, too, were rather awful, shrieking loudly and unmelodiously for attention. Tonight the flaming scarlet of her frock outrivalled the painted cheeks and carmined lips.

However, he nodded, to escape the girl's clutching fingers. Whereupon Cherrie flew to Nita, who was chatting with her fiancé, crushing with restless fingers the little French flowers that weighted one end of her golden sash. Cherrie, laughing, caught at Nita's arm.

"Come back here for Nita in five minutes, Cutler," she begged him. "Please! I want to tell her somethin'! Secrets. Kindly hoof it!"

But when Anton left, protesting, watch in hand, Cherrie's round face grew very sober.

"Oh, Nita!" she protested softly. "How could you! Wally's hurt!"

"Hurt!" Nita's hand flew to her slender throat. "How? Where? When?"

"I mean his heart's hurt. You hurt it."

"Oh, his heart!" said the girl coldly. "Men's hearts are as easily mended as punctured tires."

"Not Wally's."

"Yes! Wally's! Do you suppose if he'd cared for me he would have jeered at me, openly, in front of everyone, like he did just now?"

"That's because he loves you so. Can't you see, Nita? You hurt him something terrible."

"No," murmured Nita restlessly. "I don't think so. He's like all the men we know, Cherrie. Turning like weather-

vanes to pretty faces. He will forget me in a week."

"He's crazy about you," insisted Cherrie stoutly. "I can prove it to you." A swift turn of her head assured her that Anton was returning down the long hall. "Say, you sit in here and keep your peepers open."

She thrust the surprised and resentful Nita behind a screen of palms in the big dining-room, which had previously been a shelter for the musicians, and turned to greet Anton with a bewitching smile.

"Time's up, Cherrie! Where's Nita?"

"She's gone," declared Cherrie coolly, "to powder her nose."

She approached Cutler so closely that the scarlet line of her bodice touched the black of his evening coat. "Won't I do?" she asked saucily, with her practised sidelong glance.

"Of course you'll do," smirked Anton, "for an appetizer." And, bending, he kissed Cherrie full upon her provoking red lips. "You are a constant temptation, Cherrie."

He ran his thin, purple-veined hand down the girl's perfect, rounded arm, smiling at her with narrowed eyes. Then, at the discreet cough of an entering maid, who explained he had an urgent telephone call, he hastened away.

"Come on outa there," Cherrie addressed the palms. "The servants will be comin' to clean off the dinner things. Say, what d'ye think of your Cutler now?"

"A perfect exhibition of senility." Nita's lips were actually grim. "Once he ran his hand down my arm like that. It was like a cold, poisonous lizard creeping on human flesh."

"Honey, he wouldn't be faithful to you for a week."

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Cherrie! Hush!" Nita's nerves were jangled wires.

"Come out through the glass door. Down this path."

"Why?"

"I want you to listen. Behind that hedge."

"Thanks. I've had enough eaves-dropping."

"Nita, you'll regret it all your life if you don't. I swear I'm doin' somethin' for you I wouldn't do for another livin' soul. Honest, kid! It—it's somethin' no one knows. You just gotta listen. You gotta!"

Nita wavered. "Is it about Wally?"

"Yes. I want—"

"Then I shan't go."

"You will, too, Nita Gilmore! You walk along this side of the privet hedge and sit on that stone seat for a few minutes. I'm doin' this for you, Nita."

"You needn't," said Nita ungraciously.

But she was curious. And a little fearful. She went.

Nita could not see through the close privet hedge, but her intent ears presently caught Cherrie's breathless tones.

"Here I am, Wally. Too bad I kept you."

"It doesn't matter," said Wally tonelessly. "Nothing matters."

Cherrie sighed. "You mean—about Nita—"

"I'm rather cut up," admitted Wally briefly. "Blow right between the eyes. Didn't expect it."

Nita could hear Cherrie's silk skirts rustle along the bench. Nearer to Wally, for her voice was lower.

"I 'spose you'll think I'm a pig to say I'm glad."

"What!" Wally was registering surprise. "Why, how is that?"

"It gives little Cherrie a chance."

"At what?"

A pause. "You," said Cherrie, almost inaudibly.

Another pause. Nita could fancy Wally's astonished stare.

"Me!" he laughed shortly. "I'm not in the market, my dear girl, for matri-

mony, or love, or trifles of that sort. Did you think I was looking for consolation?"

Another pause. How horribly exasperating!—this disembodied dialog! Nita craned her pretty head in every direction. But the hedge was close and thick. She could hear her own heart now—beating high with a curious hope.

"For a good while," said Cherrie in her low voice, "I've been absolutely nuts about you, Wally. Of course, it was plain as paper that you wanted Nita. But if she won't have you—I'm not so bad, really, Wally—I—I would care a lot. I'll do anything—or be anything to you! Honest!"

"Don't be absurd, Cherrie. You must have swiped an extra glass off that trick train of Anton's."

"No! No! I care a lot, Wally. I'll do whatever you say."

"Then hunt up some excelsior and sleep off those extra cocktails and what-nots. I'm ashamed of you, really! Pulling such a skull!"

"Oh, Wall-ee!"

"See here, now Cherrie, this is all nonsense. If you're in earnest, I'm dead sorry. But you'll get over it. As for me—well, there is only one girl I honestly care about making a fuss over. 'Was,' I should say."

Another pause. Another rustle. Cherrie moving disconsolately away? Poor Cherrie! Poor dear little Cherrie. She had done this for her—Nita! Had laid her heart open, to be wounded!

V

NITA sped on golden feet back the path and around the hedge and to where Wally sat near the statue of Pan, his head in his hands and the moonlight on his solitary figure.

She floated close to him and slipped a hand inside the crook of his elbow.

"Oh, go 'way, Cherrie," growled

Wally crossly, very much as a sulky boy grunts "Go home, Towser," to his faithful follower.

But the hand remained, and with it a faint perfume that penetrated Wally's startled senses so that he raised heavy eyes to stare into Nita's blue ones, gorgeous with happiness.

"Wally, dear," she whispered, "take me away—tonight! Now! Please, dear! I love you so!"

For a long, incredulous minute he stared. Then he took her by one hand and pulled her almost roughly over the bright lawn and out to the road where his blue Redion stood.

"Why wait!" said Wally.

VI

LATE the following morning Nita, charming in blue chiffon negligée, sitting before the elaborate dressing-table in the elaborate bedroom of her elaborate hotel suite, tore open a blue envelope, Vicky-scented, just delivered by special messenger:

Dear Nita:

Say, I got the laugh on you, kid. Don't get sore, promise! But I married old Anton about an hour ago.

When I told him you'd run away with Wally Camp, and wouldn't I do, because I'd been wanting him (his wad!), why, at first he was pretty peeved, but I coaxed and kissed him into a laugh and, sure enough, he married me. He's always liked me next best to you, you know.

Honest, kid, I had to have old Anton. I'd been planning to catch him for the past six months, when you stuck your peaches-and-cream mug into the chorus and caught his eye. Anyway, you're terrible fond of Wally, though I think he's awful upstage.

Well, kid, you gotta hand it to me ain't you? Watch little Cherrie blossom out! A couple cool million! Say, don't get sore with me, and if you and Wally ever get hard up, I'll loan you a couple thousand berries. I'm sending this to Wally's hotel. Soy, you two had better move into a flat!

Cherrie.

Nita arched her delicate brows and smiled pensively. Then, with a little yawn, she trailed over to an ivory desk and drew a sheet of monogrammed stationery toward her.

My dear Cherrie:

You are not the only one who plays jokes. Fate plays them, too.

I married Wally early this morning, and not two hours later, his poor father, still ignorant of Wally's marriage, was killed instantly in an automobile accident while returning to his orange groves in southern California. Of course, he has surely left Wally his estate of about ten million. Pardon my touching upon these statistics, but I know you are intensely interested in money matters.

I wish you all the happiness you can derive from your marriage with old Anton. Do take care of him! He looks so withered.

Nita.

P. S. Still, you never can tell. Old Anton may live to be a hundred.



ANOTHER GIRL DISAPPEARS!!!

Instalment III of our exciting serial, "The House of the Missing," recounts an amazing adventure that befell Clayton and his partner, Moore. Don't miss this instalment in the August 15th SAUCY STORIES—on all newsstands August 1st.

A Rogue in Love

By W. Carey Wonderly

WHEN she was eighteen years old Alice Ainsley fell in love with Maurice Sutherland, and in an impulsive moment sat down and wrote to the actor, expressing her admiration and venturing to hope that some day she would appear in his company.

It was said of Sutherland that during a transcontinental tour he left a string of broken hearts from the Battery to the Golden Gate. He was used to stage-struck, love-sick girls, and Alice's letter was but one of many; yet he enjoyed it and tucked it away with similar missives at the bottom of his trunk.

That summer Alice appeared with the stock company in her home town, playing unimportant rôles in a capable manner, and in September she arrived in New York, with a scrapbook of notices and a burning desire to act.

Her notices were good, her wardrobe was excellent, and Alice Ainsley was a very lovely young person, attracting immediate attention in gloomy theaters and busy offices. September, however, is a bad month to be seeking engagements, when most of the companies are filled. Everyone said she was very fortunate to secure even an understudy, and especially with such a star as Maurice Sutherland.

They didn't know how she had worked for that coveted position. Since her arrival in New York she had spent half her time between the theater where Sutherland was rehearsing and the offices of the management under whose direction he played.

The office-boy fell a victim to Alice's beauty and was ever willing to carry her card in to his boss; but that gentleman refused to see Miss Ainsley because he had nothing to offer her. At the theater it was pretty much the same. Mr. Sutherland didn't engage his company; the doorman sent Alice to the managerial suite. Yet in the end her patience—or persistency!—was rewarded.

"If you please, sir, it's the same young lady again," the doorman told Sutherland, after the star had overheard an argument between the guardian of the portal and Alice. "She won't take 'no' for an answer; she wants a job."

Unseen by Alice, the actor studied the girl's fresh young beauty, noted her good clothes, and decided she was well worth knowing. His wasn't a fastidious soul, perhaps; he loved women because they were women rather than because they were lovely. But—Alice Ainsley was a lovely young woman, with something of the haunting fragrance of springtime and lilacs about her, and Sutherland felt his pulse quicken as he looked.

Hastily he wrote something on the back of his card and thrust it into the doorman's hand.

"Give her this and say she is to take it to Gladwyn," the star said.

It was the open sesame and the next morning Alice reported for rehearsal with the Maurice Sutherland company.

She was ordered to understudy Diana Devereaux, the leading lady, a creature too magnificent for words and yet too sensible ever to fall ill. The other women in the company told Alice that her engagement was a sinecure—all she

had to do was to report at the theater every night and draw her salary every week.

"Of course you'll never get the opportunity to play the part—Devereaux is too clever to give another actress a chance in her rôle; but you must have known that, darling, when you signed for the job. Things might be worse, you know, and it's a bad season. Still, if you're ambitious—"

The other girl looked at her and Alice smiled gently. Come to think of it, hadn't she achieved her ambition when she found herself on the same stage with Maurice Sutherland?

But if Alice was without ambition she wasn't the sort of understudy that Henry Ross showed himself to be. This young man, who was known as Hal to his friends, understudied Sutherland and had about as much chance of playing the part as Alice had of reading Diana's lines. The knowledge was a bitter dose, and because he found it so, he thought that Alice must suffer accordingly in her position. Misery loves company, and Hal Ross sought Alice in the theater and out of it.

"An understudy is something like a squirrel in a cage," he said once. "In spite of effort we never get anywhere. If something were to happen to Sutherland I suppose the management would close the theater."

His words turned Alice a little faint. "What could happen to Sutherland?" she wanted to know.

"What happens to all of us?" Ross said. "There are germs everywhere—laryngitis—appendicitis— But nothing will ever happen to him, you can depend on it."

Alice felt sorry for Hal, and we are told that pity is akin to love, but Sutherland— Well, all women fell down and worshipped him and Alice was a woman, scarcely twenty, too.

As for Maurice, he hadn't forgotten

Alice, even though he paid her little attention during the busy hours of rehearsal. Besides his Greek profile and splendid voice, he possessed an old-fashioned gallantry which made him a picturesque figure on the stage and Alice used to watch him from the wings with her heart in her throat and her soul in her eyes. The other actresses watched him, too, though some of them laughed derisively afterward.

"We get the thrill—oh, yes! But Devereaux will see to it that we don't get the man," they said.

It was the first time that Alice ever heard Sutherland's name connected with Diana's, and never having a special liking for the leading lady, she now avoided her.

II

BECAUSE she was a well-bred young woman, proud, if shy, Alice Ainsley tried to hide her infatuation for the actor from the rest of the company, and even Hal, who was beginning to find a real satisfaction in her society, didn't dream that she was interested in the man rather than in the artist. But Sutherland knew. Of course he had the memory of her persistent efforts to join the company to help him, but there were other signs which led him to believe that here was another heart at his feet.

He liked the idea. So long as women adored him his position in the theater was secure. He especially liked Alice—she was so young and pretty and virginal. Once the business of readying the play was over—

Even while he was promising himself a new affair of the heart, Diana Devereaux was preparing to separate Maurice and Alice. She knew best how to do it. Without illusion herself, knowing Maurice Sutherland for what he really was, Diana still retained an affection for the man and she didn't propose to stand

idly by and see him make love to another woman. She could show an interest in Alice Ainsley without creating comment; Alice was her understudy.

"If you will come to my apartment tomorrow at four o'clock I will go over your part with you, line for line," Diana said sweetly. "In case you ever are called to play it you must be letter-perfect; else Mr. Sutherland will be furious. After all, he is the star and we must work to please him."

So Alice went to the Devereaux apartment, not to please Diana, but for *his* sake. She must learn everything she could against the possibility of some day appearing opposite to him in the play.

Diana's home was small but very charming. The thing which struck Alice immediately was the quantity of photographs of Maurice in the apartment. From every wall, on table, mantel, desk, the actor's likeness gazed back at one. Alice found it a little difficult to be perfectly natural with Diana before the mournful, handsome eyes of the star.

Miss Devereaux was businesslike, yet charming. They had reached the big scene in the second act when the telephone bell rang merrily and the leading lady was forced to lay aside the script and answer the call.

Immediately Diana turned to Alice with a frown marring her handsome features.

"It is Mr. Sutherland. He is on his way up. Will you . . . go in there for a moment and wait, Miss Ainsley?"

Probably Alice mistook her directions, for when she pushed aside the curtain, she found herself in a small alcove from which there was no escape. Indeed, before she quite realized her surroundings, Sutherland was in the apartment.

His first act was to draw Diana into his arms and attempt to kiss her. The actress resisted him, and even in that moment of pain Alice caught herself

wondering how any woman could repulse Maurice.

"Please don't," murmured Miss Devereaux, and struggled to free herself.

He didn't understand and laughed with good-natured tolerance. "What have I done now?" he demanded. "Oh, Lord, Di, you're forever raking a fellow over the coals. Tell me—whom have I been making love to now?"

"I don't know, but somebody," retorted Diana coldly. "It is always somebody."

"Of course," laughed Maurice. "I should be hanged and quartered for a rogue, eh? Di, you know deep in my heart there is only one woman and she is you."

"I know you are inconstant, wayward, capricious," Diana replied. "I'm not exactly jealous, Maurice—you wrong me. But I am . . . disheartened at times. With you a new face means a new love. No, not that, either, for it isn't love."

"Forget it, my dear," he laughed, falling into a chair and lighting a cigarette in a long amber holder.

"That is a purely masculine trait—to sin and then forget it, because it happens to be unpleasant," Diana said severely. "There are some things I find very hard to forget—or forgive, Maurice. All the girls you have made unhappy—Pretty, inexperienced little moths— Even my own maid, two years ago! You can't deny it, Maurice."

"I'm not going to," he retorted lazily. "That is I, take me or leave me. But isn't it rather late in the day to be taking me to task this way, Diana? What have you found out about me this time?" He laughed deep and low and there was vanity in the man. "Take me or leave me, this is I, my dear."

Presently she got rid of him—"as soon as she could," she told Alice afterward. Alice was as white as a sheet, with scarcely voice enough to answer Diana, and when the leading lady said nothing

more about rehearsing Alice was dumbly grateful and hurried away.

However, it didn't occur to her that Miss Devereaux had staged this scene especially for her benefit. She was spared that agony.

Alice went home to her boarding-house and cried herself to sleep on the bed, but at six o'clock Hal Ross came to take her to dinner and for the first time in her life perhaps she was glad to see a man and showed it.

"Oh, Hal, it's *you*!" she said, and held his hand so tightly that he caught himself dreaming extravagantly and blushed.

They were a great deal together during the next week and it was only because his professional future was undecided that Hal restrained himself from declaring his love. Yet he believed that Alice knew he cared for her, and hoped she would wait.

"Let me get a chance at Sutherland's part once; I'll show 'em all what I can do," Ross said, setting his teeth and gripping his hands. "Now the managers won't trust me with a big part because I've 'never done anything important.' There's got to be a beginning to everything, but these theatrical moguls apparently don't see it that way. I've got to show them first—though I'm given no opportunity to do that very thing! Well, let me get my teeth in Sutherland's rôle—just once—"

Alice felt discouraged, humbled, chastened. "I don't know whether I could play Miss Devereaux's part if I got a chance at it," she said.

III

SEEING Alice and Hal together so much, and recalling the girl's expression after she had listened to the scene between Maurice and herself, Diana ceased to bother her head over the probability of the actor's indulging in another love

affair. He might be smitten, but Alice was cured. Miss Devereaux was malicious enough to laugh at the idea of Sutherland suffering from unrequited passion.

As for Maurice, the play had settled down on Broadway for what looked like a healthy run, and he found himself again with both time and the inclination to play around. He had never forgotten Alice Ainsley's long and untiring efforts to secure a position in his company, and it needed only Hal's attention to the girl in order to set the wheels in motion. Another man found her desirable, therefore it was time for Sutherland to act.

"And how do you like your first New York engagement, Miss Ainsley?" Maurice said to her one night in the wings.

Alice had a chair and was supposed to be studying Miss Devereaux's performance.

Once, had he spoken to her, she would have blushed and stammered. Now she laughed a little at his question, for it stirred her sense of humor.

"I suppose it is a New York engagement, Mr. Sutherland," she told him, still smiling; "though I have never set foot on the stage before an audience nor spoken a line out loud."

He laughed too. "An understudy's job isn't very thankful, is it?" he said. "However, who knows when you will go on in the part? We aren't wishing Miss Devereaux any bad luck, are we? But you're quite prepared for any emergency, if I know the signs, Miss Ainsley. Love the theater?"

"Yes."

"Like New York?"

"I've seen really very little of the city—with daily rehearsals— But now—"

It was his opportunity, and he seized it. "I adore New York," said Sutherland with the impressiveness which characterized his love scenes. "I was born here, have lived here pretty much all my

life, and yet I never grow tired of it, never see enough of the old town. Unfortunately most of my friends aren't of the same heart. Do you know what I should like to do, Miss Ainsley?"

He was smiling down into her eyes, and while recognizing his striking personality, he left her heart cold. All the time she was thinking of Diana's words—of the silly girls he had made unhappy—even a maid!

Since she didn't answer at once, he repeated his question. "Do you know what I'd like to do, Miss Ainsley?"

"I can't imagine," she faltered, because she did guess what was in his mind.

"I'd like to go on an exploring expedition with you!" Sutherland cried, his handsome head very close to hers. "I'd like to show you New York—like to see it all over again with you. May I?"

He was as humble as a mid-Victorian lover. Alice had to recall the man's cool indifference and frank audacity in Diana's apartment before she could believe her own ears. What an actor he was! A rogue, he called himself.

"I'm sorry," she said, with a fierce little sigh of relief, "but Mr. Ross and I are going to explore New York together. You see, he is a provincial too, Mr. Sutherland, and it will be rather fun uncovering things for ourselves. Thanks just the same—"

He caught her up eagerly. "I know places—quaint, picturesque corners of the town that the average fellow never discovers. You can't say 'no,' Miss Ainsley, when I beg . . . so humbly—!"

But "no" is exactly what Alice did say, though she added with a gentle smile, "I'm sorry." As a matter of fact, the star's attitude filled her breast with conflicting emotions since she doubted his sincerity even while his pleading stirred her deeply. Fancy Maurice Sutherland begging humbly! Yet he was ever the actor.

It required only Alice's refusal to add the requisite fuel to the flame of Sutherland's passion and when he saw her leave the theater, after the performance, with Hal Ross, Maurice was satisfied again that he had found the one woman in all the world.

When Diana met him he looked haggard, wild-eyed, like a man who had been drinking. Miss Devereaux knew the signs; once more Maurice was in the throes of a great love. But his life was made up of affairs of the heart, and for the rest she believed he had met his match in Alice.

Then, just when he faced the darkest hour, when he seemed unable to work or play because of this girl, Sutherland came across Alice's letter, almost two years old now, at the bottom of his trunk.

He had always saved these *billets-doux*, finding them a pleasant help in trouble. Alice's letter renewed his faith in himself, gave him courage, and led him to believe that her present attitude was merely a pose. Of course she cared for him! What the coquette wanted was fire, devotion, proof.

To celebrate the hundredth performance of the play in New York there was a dance and supper given to the company after the show in the greenroom of the theater. This handsome and spacious apartment, modeled after the green-rooms of Shakespeare's day, in what was a new and very smart playhouse, was located below the level of the stage and the principal dressing-rooms opened off of it.

All the women wore their prettiest frocks for the party, and there was an orchestra from one of the cabarets, and a punch that would have been loudly acclaimed in pre-Volstead days.

Their host was doing himself proud, and friends crowded around to congratulate him, but Sutherland had eyes for only one person, listened for only one

voice. But friends were right when they called this his night of nights; Maurice intended it to be that.

Out of courtesy to his leading lady it was necessary for him to open the dance with Diana, but the lady's charms and the dreamy measures of the waltz left him cold and unmoved. All the while he was watching Alice Ainsley—Alice who smiled so divinely in the arms of young Ross. She refused to look at him, even while she must have felt his eyes upon her, but Maurice wasn't disheartened. It was all a game to bring him to her feet, of course.

The dance stopped and an encore was demanded and given. Maurice and Diana had held their places on the floor, and now as the music started up again, he claimed her for the extra.

Diana eluded him and stepped back. "No, you don't, my dear fellow," she said, smiling. "No man may dance with me and flirt with another woman at the same time. I'm not jealous, understand, Maurice; I merely refuse to be insulted before all these people. Take me over to the sofa and don't come near me again until you have recovered your senses."

"Very well!" No woman owned him; he would take Diana at her word. There was a swagger to the man as he escorted his leading lady to the sofa and left her there. He'd show Di a thing or two. It was she who had cut the bonds between them. Now he was free to go to Alice—morally free as well as legally so.

There was no reason to be advanced for refusing to dance with Sutherland. He was their star and he had danced with every woman in the company, even the grand dame who was seventy and had grandchildren in the profession. Presently Alice found herself in Maurice's arms, his eyes on her face, his voice low and tense in her ear.

"If I were asked to name the loveliest creature here tonight—" he said, and

paused significantly, waiting for her reply.

Alice laughed. "And have you said that to each of us you've danced with? Thank you, but I know—"

"Know what?" he demanded eagerly.

She felt the color stealing into her cheeks. "I know you are merely being nice to me, an unimportant member of your company." Then, as he opened his lips in protest, "I know your reputation as a ladies' man, Mr. Sutherland, and forgive you."

Maurice looked sad. "Why won't you take me seriously?" he said.

"That wouldn't be fair." Alice didn't feel like smiling, but she did so, hoping to hold him at arm's length by refusing to accept him solemnly.

"I love you!" His touch was hot, unyielding.

"Please, Mr. Sutherland!" She couldn't make a scene here, before all these people.

"I mean it—I love you, Alice," he cried. "Can't you see it in my face, read the truth in my eyes, my speech? You are driving me mad! Your indifference, your flirtations with other men—with Ross!—have gotten under my skin and I can neither work nor sleep nor eat. My friends notice this change— Be merciful, dear, and say you care—a little."

She shook her head gently. "I'm afraid I don't," she said. "Perhaps it would be better if I resign from the company—"

"I won't permit it!"

"Then you must never talk like this again."

"I love you so—!"

"No, I don't think you love me, Mr. Sutherland," Alice said, meeting his eyes squarely. "This isn't love. Because mine is a new face; because you don't know me as you do the others— I'm sorry, but you can't add my scalp to your—your collection."

"So that is it!" he cried, his face

ablaze. "You have heard rumors; someone has been carrying tales, raking among the dead ashes of the past! It isn't that you don't love me; it's simply that you've listened to these lies and think you can't trust me!"

"No, no!" she protested, drawing away from him.

"I will prove my love, Alice—!"

"Please, Mr. Sutherland! People will hear you! They are looking at us—Miss Devereaux, there on the divan—You are mistaken, and I don't care for you—except as a great artist—"

"Artist, artist! Always you talk about my art, as if there was nothing else, as if I am less than man because I appear upon the stage. I am man and lover—your lover; you shall see, my dear! I care so deeply and so much that I could shout my passion to the wind—"

"Don't! Miss Devereaux— Hal is looking— There! the music has stopped. Please let me go—"

Sutherland held fast to her arm. "There is something I must show you, Alice."

The musicians were silent. The floor was clearing. Men and women gathered around the punch bowl, and there was much laughing and talking and smoking. For the moment, Alice saw neither Diana nor Hal. It seemed to her that above all things a scene was to be avoided.

She knew that Hal didn't like Sutherland, whom he called a roué and a philanderer. If any unpleasantness occurred she and Hal would be forced to leave the company, and they couldn't afford that, in the middle of the season, with engagements few and far between. Thus it came about that Alice suffered Maurice to lead her to his dressing-room.

It opened directly off the greenroom, and with the door open she was within sight and sound of the party. During the evening Miss Devereaux had held a

small court in her room, and other members of the company invited special friends to their dressing-rooms, where it was popularly supposed a coveted brew was on tap. Really it was the simplest thing to do, and Alice allowed Sutherland to escort her to his apartment.

The door was left wide, there was only a light curtain between them and the outside world. Maurice Sutherland lost no time, but at once produced the love letter which Alice had written him nearly two years ago.

When she recognized it, her face turned crimson. She didn't dream that he had saved it—that he even remembered it. Since coming to Broadway Alice had learned that it was a common occurrence for a successful player, especially a so-called *matinée* idol, to receive a daily volume of notes from impulsive girls and women. Few actors saved such correspondence, and fewer still accepted it seriously. Yet Sutherland had kept her letter!

"Now do you still deny that you care?" he asked, bending toward her triumphantly.

Instinctively she put out her hand for the missive. "It was just a foolish, schoolgirl mash note," she faltered. "I wrote it before I went on the stage, at a time when I still believed—"

"Believed what, Alice?" he asked tenderly.

"I believed in—everything, then, I think," she told him slowly. "If I haven't retained my faith in . . . everything—"

"Lies, lies, all of them!" he cried, with a wide sweep of his arms, as if he would annihilate armies. "You've got to believe in me—you must believe when I say I love you—"

"No! Don't! It is useless—"

"You must believe!" His voice rose to a hysterical note. "I would die for you—I mean it, Alice. Without your

love, life isn't worth living. Unless you say that you believe— Wait!"

Dropping the letter on his dressing-table, Sutherland brushed aside the curtain and rushed from the dressing-room. Alice was about to follow him when she noticed the letter, and delayed her escape in order to claim that. Why not? It was hers. Her hand went out and covered it. A second later it was in the bosom of her gown, against her heart, but . . . Sutherland had returned. She had delayed her departure too long.

Sutherland was white as a sheet; his hand in the pocket of his dinner coat trembled visibly. When he withdrew it Alice saw that his fingers gripped a small revolver.

At first she was frightened speechless. She could neither move nor cry out. And then . . . she recognized the weapon. It was the pistol which they used in the play and Sutherland had gone to the property-room, a dozen yards away, to secure it.

He stood with his back to the door and placed the revolver over his heart.

"Do you believe me now?" he asked, with a strange smile on his lips. "Do you believe I am in earnest, that I love you, that I am willing to die for my love in order to convince you? Alice, I am on the threshold of eternity, and you must believe. Don't punish me for past sins, dear. Don't let false pride stand in our way to happiness. I love you. You care—?"

She was very sure of the pistol—recognized even the dent in it where Miss Devereaux once had dropped it on the brick pavement. It was loaded with blanks, of course.

"I'm sorry, but I don't care, Mr. Sutherland," she said slowly. "Yes, I cared once—or it was infatuation; that is when I wrote that silly letter. Later, when I came to New York and secured this engagement—yes, I cared then, too. If I have changed, it is your fault. Once

I was too inexperienced to separate the actor from the man. Now I have met a real man, and I know an actor when I meet one."

"Meaning me?"

"Yes."

"And the real man—Ross?" His lips were dry, his hands all a-tremble.

After a pause, Alice answered: "Yes; I love Hal Ross. He is real, while you—you are acting even now—"

Her words brought the blood to his cheeks—he was scarlet—angry, ashamed, routed.

His eyes flashed hatred in that moment; then he pointed the revolver, and fired.

The report, of course, was quite genuine. In the other room men and women ceased their chatter, turned, and then crowded to the door of the star's dressing-room. Sutherland had fallen across the sill, and there was a dark, ever-widening stain on the bosom of his white shirt.

"She has killed him!" It was Diana's voice, high and shrill.

She didn't know how it happened, but Alice found herself in Hal's arms. "It was the prop gun, the one we use in the play, and filled with blanks," Alice said in toneless accents.

Several of the men were on their knees beside Sutherland, who, with eyes open, had remained silent since the report.

"He has been shot; it wasn't a blank," announced these men. "Get a doctor; God knows how serious the wound is!"

IV

AFTER they had poured brandy between his lips, and just before the physician arrived, Maurice Sutherland roused himself sufficiently to make a statement.

"It was the property gun used in the play, and I shot it myself. Miss Ainsley had nothing to do with it. And—I

didn't know it was loaded with cartridges."

Then he lapsed into unconsciousness.

Naturally everyone wanted to wait to hear the doctor's verdict. They withdrew to the greenroom and whispered together in corners.

Miss Devereaux shut herself in her dressing-room and it was there Alice and Hal Ross found her a few minutes later.

"There is something Miss Ainsley wants to say to you," announced the young man, looking very strong and handsome standing there beside his sweetheart. "She wants to tell you what really occurred in the dressing-room between Mr. Sutherland and herself."

Diana's eyes were cold and dry but Alice spoke quickly, frankly.

"You have said that I shot Mr. Sutherland. I didn't; you've heard him admit that, and state that the pistol was in his own hand. Mr. Sutherland had been making love to me, and I—I refused to take him seriously. He asked me to come to his dressing-room, he had something to show me. It was a love letter, written years ago by a silly schoolgirl to a great actor—yes, I wrote it to him.

"I told Mr. Sutherland that since then I had changed, and now it was the actor I admired, while the man in my life was—was Hal, here. I told Mr. Sutherland that he really didn't care for me—it was simply a case of new face, new fancy; but he swore that unless I believed him, and cared in return, he would kill himself.

"He had disappeared a moment before and returned with the pistol. I recognized it, of course, and I thought it was loaded with blanks, as it is in the play. When he turned the gun upon himself, I—I didn't stop him; because I thought he was still acting—"

Her voice died away; Hal caught the sound of a sob in her throat.

"If he dies it won't be my fault, but I

feel that I can never be happy again."

Diana's brow cleared. "You are a sensible girl," she cried, "and I hope you and Mr. Ross will be very happy. As for Maurice—" She dug her teeth into her lip to keep back the tears. "He mustn't die," she moaned.

Then the doctor came with his verdict.

"Mr. Sutherland is ready to go home. A few days' rest, and then— He is a very fortunate man. Happily the bullet struck the steel rib of the corset he was wearing and instead of a tragedy he has merely a flesh wound. Mr. Sutherland is asking for you, Miss Devereaux."

Neither Maurice Sutherland nor Diana Devereaux appeared in the leading rôles of the play for the remainder of the week, and so it came about that their understudies got their chance.

And Alice and Hal covered themselves with glory. Indeed, the management liked them in the parts so well that they were put under contract to head the company which was to open in Chicago.

"Everything's so wonderful, Hal!" whispered Alice. "There's not a cold except the mystery of the shooting. For there always were blanks in that pistol, dear. How that single cartridge came to be there—"

"It was Diana put it there," Hal told her. "Miss Devereaux saw you and Sutherland go into his dressing-room, and then she disappeared into hers, which is just next door, and listened. She heard what Maurice said, and knew the man well enough to divine what he meant to do. Before he could get the gun, she slipped out of her room, and changed the blank for the real thing. I'm sure Sutherland knows and has forgiven her. She was half mad with jealousy and was determined if she couldn't have him, no one else should. Since it was just a flesh wound, the whole incident is closed."

Then he drew her into a sheltered doorway and kissed her.

Heartbreak

By Dorothy Dow

WHO shall recall, when the charm is gone,
Kisses and glances long since over?
Only a memory hovers, vague—
Only the name of a one-time lover.

Never . . . forever . . . so vows have gone,
Mixed in the glamor of love and laughter;
Promises, prayers of a mad desire—
Who would recall them, a month's time after?

Ah, but her lips and her arms were fair!
Her for myself, all the world forsaking—
Vows that were made . . . unmade . . . forgotten . . .
How will they help, when the heart is breaking?



A young outcast from society goes back home and finds but one friend—the most popular flapper of the town. How she restores his good name and his faith in himself is told in Joel Townsley Rogers's dramatic novelette "More Deathly than Carbolic." In the August 15th number of

SAUCY STORIES

The Radio Roadster

By Howard Rockey

FULL of surprises as Camp *Carefree* was, no one imagined it would develop the thrill provided by its private radio station that summer evening.

Carefree is one of those exclusive outdoor communities which has become a rendezvous for those who like to rough it in luxury. Beautifully situated in the foothills of the Adirondacks, it is the haven of the never-idle rich who prefer privacy at any price, and seek sport as an antidote for the strain of a social season.

The night when it all took place was a bit too pleasant for remaining in cozy bungalows or the roomy community clubhouse—at least it seemed so to the more active set.

A gay little group in flannels and sport togs was gathered about a fire of pine boughs, but Alicia Gray and Ted Van Horn strolled across the lawn to the little radio building. In an effort to amuse them, the wireless operator tuned in on several broadcasts, but the two soon tired of listening to the start of a stupid lecture and parts of a concert or two.

Then Alicia asked the man to get Nick Brewster's pretentious place, nestling under the mountain at the other end of the valley, and in due time Doris Brewster's voice came clearly through the ether.

"Nick's off somewhere in his roadster," she said as Alicia adjusted the headpiece over her bobbed locks. "I'm sure he's up to mischief, and I thought

that perhaps he might have driven over to *Carefree*."

"If he comes I'll send him home," laughed Alicia. "I'm tired of flirting with the husbands of my friends."

"By the way—speaking of flirting," Doris went on, "did you hear that Carmen Castleton arrived on the *Calasitania* yesterday?"

"No," answered Alicia, with a twinkle in her eye. "Surely you don't suppose that Nick's gone off to meet her?"

"Hardly," Doris admitted with amusement; "but you know you never can tell with these opera singers. Most of the really nice men I know have lost their heads, if not their hearts, to her at one time or another."

"Oh, come on!" growled Ten Van Horn; "she'll chatter all night if you let her. Cut off and let's pick up some jazz from one of the New York roofs."

Ten minutes later they were toddling on the big outdoor dance floor, as the syncopation of the orchestra from the Glitter Garden sounded from the gigantic amplifier the camp had installed. At intervals the music changed, when the radio operator sought variety of program, and the novelty of trotting to strains from miles away rather appealed to the crowd. The sensation was almost like that of possessing magic ears, for the receiving range of the station was more powerful than is permitted by the letter of the law. But enforcement agents of every sort gave *Carefree* a wide berth, and many obnoxious laws were dead-letters at the camp. Hence the sound waves brought them news and amusement from astonishing distances.

But after a little time the floor became deserted, and the couples seated themselves about the fire to enjoy a cigarette or perhaps a cocktail from surreptitious flasks.

Then, enchantingly out of the night, caught up by the tall antennae, came the notes of a song which held them spell-bound. It was sung in a soft, sensuous voice, with wonderful clearness and sweetness, and at first they thought the singer must be close at hand. But as they listened they realized otherwise. It did not originate anywhere about the camp, but was coming by radio-phone.

Now it grew louder and wilder and more abandoned, and as they recognized the air and its orchestral accompaniment the spell was broken.

"A phonograph!" someone laughed. "For a moment I thought the voice was real—but it's only a Castleton record—*Fillee de Cadix*."

"Perhaps Nick's playing it to celebrate the return of the beautiful lady," Alicia whispered to Van Horn with a wink.

But even though it was unmistakably a talking-machine, a silence fell over the group and they listened with genuine pleasure. Then the orchestration suddenly ceased and the song itself seemed to grow more distinct and more appealing.

"That's no phonograph!" said Evelyn Duars. "It must be Castleton herself. They've shut off the machine and *she's* taken up the song."

"Nonsense," objected Tom Trueman, "Castleton's abroad—"

"Maybe she's singing in the salon of a steamer at sea," suggested another.

"Absurd!" objected a third. "She landed yesterday—came in on the same steamer with Carter Harrington. He's been sketching in Italy ever since May, you know."

But as they sat there speculating, another aria came to their ears from the

amplifier. This time there was no mistaking Castleton's own notes. They could even discern through the ether a laughing remark in the diva's rich tones, although whatever she said was unintelligible.

Castleton then began a little *chanson* that Alicia had heard her render at several studio parties, and which she knew the singer had never recorded for the needle discs. She said as much to Van Horn, and he nodded reminiscently. Once she had sung it to him—not only with her eyes—but with all of her artistry—and he had almost made a sentimental fool of himself.

For several minutes they were thrilled by the loveliness of the lyric wafted to them through the silence from some unknown source. The words were tender and tear-compelling—moving, as only Castleton could make them—but the song suddenly ended in a shrill, piercing scream.

Immediately after came a terrified flood of high-pitched feminine words, too rapidly uttered for anyone to grasp. A masculine voice shouted something wildly. A sharp crack—perhaps a pistol shot—punctuated the cry. Then a deeper voice called "Help!" And finally a jumble of letters—"W-X-A-D"—but the voice was silenced before the garbled combination could be understood.

And there was not another sound.

II

IN an instant the campers were crowding the doorway of the camp radio office. Everyone was asking questions at once, but the operator announced that the sending had been shut off.

"Can't you tell where it came from?" he was asked. He shook his head.

"Not exactly," he confessed. "So far as they knew, I wasn't receiving the message. They were only broadcasting—and I got it just as I caught the other

things you've heard. This valley's full of amateur stations."

"But you surely have an idea!" it was insisted.

"Vaguely," he admitted. "It must have come over a three-hundred-meter wave-length or less—so it couldn't be far away. But I haven't any means of figuring what station is meant by those letters, although an official register would tell."

"Well, why bother?" shrugged Courtney Blair. "Somebody's trying to pull a joke on us. Everybody knows we pick up waves in the evening, and they're hoping we'll fall for the trick."

But Alicia gripped Van Horn's arm and whispered excitedly.

"There's something about it that makes me feel all creepy," she told him. "Oh, can't he catch them again and find out whether anything's wrong?"

"I've been trying," the operator said, "but they seem to be dead."

Alicia gave a horrified shudder, but Van Horn reassured her. "He only means in a radio sense," Ted explained. "He can't catch any more waves from them."

"Just wait a minute," the operator suggested. "I'll broadcast a bit myself, and ask whether anyone else heard what we did."

Then, as they stood about him, he began to send his spoken queries through the air in every direction, to be caught by countless radio sets in the valley and up the mountainside. A few moments ago, in his efforts to pick up the song more distinctly, he had adjusted his loops to intercept it to better advantage. That experiment had made him believe that the singer's voice came over the waves from the north. Consequently, he started to volley questions diagonally to the east and west of the point where he suspected the musical message had emanated.

Soon he began to be flooded with

replies, and it was some moments before he could establish order out of chaos in his receiving set. But gradually, one by one, he commenced to receive answers from various spots over the countryside.

The song and the supposed shot and the partial S O S had all been distinguished by houses equipped with antennae for miles around. And the consensus of opinion was that the alarm was a hoax.

But the operator told Van Horn that Police Headquarters at West Farmington was now taking a hand in the hunt.

The campers were in a flurry of excitement, but the wireless operator shut off his amplifier so that incoming news reached no ears but his own.

Dick Duars and Emlyn Warren were for getting out their plane and soaring over the valley in search of what they might see, but the others argued that such a proceeding was hopeless, especially at night, when the roads could hardly be seen at the altitude the two would have to maintain.

Nevertheless, the men started off for the hangars, and Ted Van Horn gave a surprised exclamation as he glanced at the memo the wireless man was writing on his pad. The Chief of Police had traced the mysterious signal letters and advised the camp operator of the name of the man from whose set they had come—if the call was genuine.

Without a word to the others, Van Horn led Alicia aside and told her what he had seen. The name the operator had penciled was that of Carter Harrington, whose bachelor studio-bungalow was perched halfway up the mountain, not twenty miles from *Carefree* as the crowd flies.

"Ted," Alicia said as she gripped his arm, "I wish I knew whether Nick has gone home. Somehow I can't help linking Nick with anything that concerns Carmen Castleton. Just suppose she

really was with Harrington, and Nick should run across them!"

"There might be the deuce of a row!" Van Horn surmised. "I think I'll call up and ask if he is there. I'll use the telephone, so as not to muddle in with all the radio racket that's going on in the air."

He did, and it seemed to him that he could never persuade Doris Brewster to stop her chattering. He gave her no hint of his purpose in phoning, and from her conversation he was certain she did not know of the excitement at the camp. She had not used their radio since talking with Alicia—and Nick had not come home. Doris was quite peevish about it because she had guests for bridge, so the circumstance only made Van Horn more suspicious and apprehensive.

"Alicia," he confided when he hung up, "I don't relish this business at all. You know Harrington and Nick have never liked each other—and of course you know that Nick likes Carmen a lot. I'm going to get out my roadster and beat it to Harrington's just as fast as I can get there."

"Right-o!" Alicia commended. "It's the only thing to do—although I can't believe that Nick could be such a fool."

"Nor I," echoed Van Horn; "but I mean to find out."

"Of course we must," said Alicia, and laughed when he looked at her with sudden disapproval. "Now don't imagine for a minute that you're going alone. There's no use of your arguing—go and get your car."

III

TEN minutes later Alicia and Van Horn, snugly wrapped in polo coats, were shooting recklessly down the winding road which leads from the plateau of the camp to the valley below.

Although their ears could not catch the disturbance in the ether, it was

rippling and pounding with radio waves which were broadcasting the fact that a crime had been committed within the community. Message after message, hurled out for all to pick up at their home stations, gave warning that a criminal might be lurking nearby, and urged every citizen to join in the radio posse then in pursuit of the supposed fugitive.

But the only anxiety the two in the roadster experienced concerned what might have happened at Harrington's studio, and each felt a lurking fear that they might arrive there too late.

Even then, without their knowledge, a squad of cycle police was roaring toward the scene from West Farmington. Overhead, too, a graceful, shadowy biplane soared and dipped as it watched for a possible trial at escape by an aerial route.

Van Horn was making his car eat up the smooth roads, taking short-cuts where he dared and detouring where he did not. It was only about nine-thirty when they left the camp, and for almost an hour he hardly slackened the pace at which he set out. Once or twice they were hailed when passing some cottage, but neither Ted nor Alicia responded to these calls.

Now, before half-past ten, they were climbing the final stretch which would bring them to Harrington's house. Already its shadowy outlines were plainly silhouetted against the silver-hued sky, and a sudden sense of caution came to Van Horn.

"Duck down in the car, Alicia, and keep covered up!" he shouted against the roar of the wind; but she only shook her head and laughed at him.

"Attend to your driving and never mind me—or you'll run over the cliff! I have my automatic, and I'm perfectly able to use it."

That ended the conversation, and a few minutes later the two of them leaped from the machine as it stopped with a

grinding of brakes in front of the bungalow.

A light gleamed through the leaded panes of the window and streamed brilliantly through the open door. Yet, save for the noises of the night, the place was as still as a tomb.

Even in the anxiety of the moment, Van Horn blamed himself for permitting the girl to come; but he could not help admiring her fearless courage. In fact, she was so impetuous that he was obliged to seize her roughly and thrust her aside, to prevent her entering the place before him. Then he crossed the veranda at a bound and stepped alone through the doorway of the spacious living-room.

Obviously, the police had not arrived, and none of the neighbors appeared to have ventured up there. The easels and furniture of the familiar room seemed to be undisturbed, and, so far as Van Horn could see, the apartment was deserted.

With his gun clutched tightly in his fingers he called out loudly; but no one answered him, and Alicia crowded behind him into the room. Over his shoulder she caught sight of the feet and legs of a man protruding from under a table, and involuntarily she uttered a horrified scream.

Van Horn stepped forward quickly and, kneeling beside the body, found himself peering into the features of Carter Harrington. At a glance he saw that the artist was dead, and the blood was oozing from a jagged hole in his forehead. Clearly there was nothing they could do for him, and Van Horn, with some apprehension, began to search the place. Quite possibly they might be watched, and he was afraid for Alicia; but if she felt any timidity it was not apparent.

With a business-like air she examined the room while Van Horn peered into the alcove where Harrington's bed was

made up, and then satisfied himself that the kitchen was empty.

He found no vestige of any intruder. The two were alone with the corpse, and the murderer was gone. If Carmen Castleton had been there, not even a trace of the exotic scent she used was noticeable. But the lid of the phonograph cabinet was raised, and on the dial was set the *Fillex de Cadix* record, in mute evidence that the signal of distress had come from this very room.

Harrington was dressed in a dinner jacket, and a polo cap lay upon the rug, but the studio was dusty and, despite the open door, the air was damp and stale. No trunk or other luggage was to be found, and it seemed as though the bungalow had not been occupied since the owner's departure for Europe some months before. Nor was there a car parked outside anywhere near the building.

Van Horn looked at Alicia with a hopeless expression. "I guess I'm pretty sad as a detective," he confessed ruefully. "Who was here—how they got here—and where they've gone is much too much for me!"

"And for me," conceded Alicia. "But a bullet made that wound—and poor Carter has no gun."

She turned away from the gruesome object on the floor and went curiously to the table where a radio set was mounted. "It's clicking," she said in surprise.

The varnished surface on which the double throw-switch rested was blistered and burned, and, if it had not been for the wound in Harrington's forehead, Van Horn might have supposed that an electric shock had killed him.

Whether the dead man or someone else had been receiving or sending, Ted could not tell, but he saw that the switch was now barely touching the receiving amplifier. He pushed it all the way over and put the headpiece to his ears.

Instantly the hissing and grinding from the troubled ether hurt his drums.

As he adjusted the keys, Van Horn wondered whether the murderer had listened-in and, after catching the hue and cry from the air, had hurriedly departed. But now he wanted first to report what he had found and, not knowing the police signal, he tried to get the camp.

"They're still babbling like fury," Van Horn told Alicia, "and this set's not powerful enough for me to drown them out."

"What are you going to do?" she asked, coming nearer to him and carefully avoiding contact with the corpse beneath the table.

"Explain to the operator at *Carefree*—" he answered; but as he tried to call, a voice came from the veranda.

"Perhaps you can explain to me just as well!" said a khaki-clad cycle-cop as he stepped through the door and covered the man at the radio set with his pistol.

IV

SOARING overhead and sweeping the moon-bathed valley with a powerful pair of night glasses, Dick Duars and Emlyn Warren were keeping a sharp lookout. But although they flew as low as they dared, the messages they wirelessly back to *Carefree* were all discouraging. Yet because of the very hopelessness of the task they had undertaken they would not abandon their flight.

Then suddenly Duars uttered an exclamation which caused Warren to peer over the side as the other's words came to him through the speaking-tube. Faintly discernible far below, they could see a tiny object scurrying down the mountain road like a frightened insect. Ahead of it projected two tiny feelers of light, and the man with the glasses knew it was a motor-car. But it was not the headlights which attracted his attention.

It was rather a curious flashing—green and yellow glows like those which emanate from a firefly in the air.

"Emlyn!" he called excitedly, "whoever's in that car is taking bigger chances than we are. It's crazy enough for us to tempt a fall, but he's running straight for the devil if he keeps up that pace along those fool roads."

And in another instant both aviators knew the meaning of those firefly flashes.

"That car's equipped with a radio aerial," Duars went on. "It's picking up all our chatter as it goes along."

Then he flashed the news of his discovery back to the station at *Carefree*, from where it was shot out again to Police Headquarters. For the plane to land and investigate on that tree-studded terrain was impossible, but orders were already humming over telephone wires to the police substation at the foot of the mountain. That started a trio of motorcycle officers in the direction of the southerly mountain road, and the men in the plane kept on the alert for another view of the car.

For a time it disappeared from view amid the trees and turnings of the hillside, but once more it emerged in the moonlight, and again the telltale flashes came from it.

Duars leaned over the side of the basket and dropped something from the plane toward the earth. Far below them it flared, and as it did so, a parachute opened, launching a group of flares.

But as it happened, the motorcycle police had no need of this aid in finding the fugitive car. Shortly after eleven o'clock they came upon it. Its radiator was crushed in like an accordion, where it had collided with a giant boulder at a turn in the road. Its lamps were shattered and the wires erected upon the windshield were badly tangled and broken.

The aviators' suspicion had been

correct, and the driver of the machine had evidently been listening to the repeated volleys of air waves as he raced along.

In any event, the occupant of the wrecked automobile had completely disappeared. What had become of him was a mystery, even though the ownership of the battered machine was not. In fact, the police had been suspicious of its identity from the first receipt of news about its radio equipment. Now they did not even need to consult the license tags to recognize the once smart roadster as the yellow speed car in which Nick Brewster rushed about the country. The officers knew that Brewster was a radio enthusiast, and, besides, they had seen him at the wheel earlier in the evening.

The accident—if it was one—gave a different complexion to the matter, however. The course of the car was known, not only because of the plane, but because the only way it *could* have come was past the Harrington place. The question was: *Where* was Brewster?

Then one of the policemen tumbled upon his side and uttered a howl of pain. His companions sprang to his aid, and, more enraged than hurt, he held up something soft which he had found in the road. It was a satin slipper with a glistening rhinestone buckle, and in stepping upon its high French heel the man had turned his ankle.

The roadster was quickly forgotten and the officers turned their attention to a search for the Cinderella whose shoe they had found. It was but the work of moments before their search lamps revealed a feminine form in the underbrush by the side of the road.

The unconscious woman was clad in a badly torn evening gown, and her hands and face were cruelly lacerated. But the thing which startled the officers most, as they lifted her tenderly, was the fact that her arms and ankles were securely bound.

Strips had been torn from the evening wrap which partly enveloped her, and these bonds had been drawn so tightly that she could not move. Some of the same soft material was thrust into her mouth, and a knotted handkerchief held the rude gag in place.

In one corner were the initials of Carter Harrington.

V

ALICIA and Ted Van Horn had very little trouble in substantiating their story to the police who had rushed in upon them at the Harrington bungalow. The sergeant in charge would not permit Ted to call *Carefree* by radio. He wished the room to await the coroner's coming precisely as it was; but a telephone to the camp had promptly vouched for them and the fact that they were not present when the murder was committed.

Neither of them desired to take the officer into their confidence regarding Nick Brewster, but on the plea that something might be learned there, he readily consented to go with them to the Brewster home. So the sergeant left a detail in charge of the studio and the corpse, and, bundling into Ted's machine, they started down the mountain.

Both Alicia and Ted were more than dismayed at the turn affairs had taken. They feared that unless his friends acted quickly Nick would become involved. Even they had been somewhat doubtful, despite their affection for him, and if left to the tender mercies of a blundering rural police force, Van Horn imagined Nick's chances would be slim indeed.

Instead of resenting their eagerness to help in solving the crime, the sergeant appeared to welcome their wish to cooperate. However, he was not quite satisfied that their purpose was not prompted by some ulterior motive—

which was another reason why he felt it just as well to keep them with him—for the present at least.

But at last Teddy's roadster roared up the road and halted outside the hedge of the Brewster cottage. As it came to a stop the sergeant leaped out quickly and ran toward two motorcycles which had just come to a halt. Alicia and Van Horn were at his heels, and Alicia caught Ted by the arm as she saw the officers lift the form of a woman from the side seat of one of the cycles.

"It is Carmen!" she whispered, and then at a sign from the sergeant, followed the little party into the house.

Doris Brewster met them in the richly furnished hall with a mixture of amazement and resentment in her eyes. In the far corner her guests, looking up from their cards, rose and rallied to their hostess' side.

"I'm sorry, ma'am," the officer said, "but there has been an accident and this lady needs a doctor as quick as we can get one—"

"I don't wish to seem heartless," Doris said rather coldly, "but there is no physician here. Why don't you keep on to Camp *Carefree*—there's a splendid dispensary there?"

Then she caught sight of Alicia coming through the door, and, at a gesture from her, looked questioning into the face of the injured woman. For a moment her body stiffened and her eyes flashed unpleasantly; but a whispered remark from Alicia quieted the outburst that threatened.

"Carry her into my own bedroom," she said to the police, and a few moments later Carmen was lying on Doris' bed.

Slowly the diva's dark eyes opened and looked about, and a little shudder ran through her slender frame. Alicia and Doris and Ted remained in the background, and the three from the bridge table stood outside in the hall. So

Carmen, regaining consciousness, saw only the police, and a faint smile of relief came over her pale features.

"Is he caught?" she breathed anxiously, and again the look of terror distorted her face—an expression of haunted loathing that was pitiful to see.

"Who?" asked the sergeant sharply, and all of them strained their ears.

"Mr. Brewster, of course—who else?" she said with arching eyebrows, and then the tears gushed from her eyes and her body shook with emotion. "I never knew the man could be such a brute!"

With a convulsive catch of her throat, Doris turned away, and Alicia led her quickly out of the room, but Van Horn listened eagerly, with nervously twitching fingers, as the officers pressed her for further information.

At first she could not give it consecutively, but, piece by piece, the sergeant drew the story from her:

On the steamer she and Harrington had become secretly engaged, and had motored up from New York to the Highview Hotel. They had arrived only that evening and had dined there together without revealing their matrimonial plans. Then, in the early evening, Harrington had engaged a car from the garage at the inn. He had wished her to see the studio-bungalow and to make plans with her for its early alteration.

"What became of the hired car?" the sergeant asked suspiciously, for something about the woman appeared to set him thinking.

"Mr. Harrington sent the chauffeur away and told him to come back for us at one o'clock," she answered simply.

"And then?"

"We talked for a little, and after a while I began to look at his records. It was pleasant to find that he had all of my own, and just for fun I put one on the phonograph. Then, as he knew I had been intrigued by the wireless on

shipboard, he connected his radio set and we listened to that for a time."

"But you sang yourself?" the sergeant persisted.

"Of course," she said with a weary smile, "and Mr. Harrington sent it out—broadcasting is it they say?"

"Then what happened?" demanded the sergeant.

Carmen Castleton seemed to shrink under his steady gaze.

"Must I answer—now?" she pleaded, turning her face away. "I am hurt—and oh, so tired—"

"I'll call a doctor as soon as you've told me the truth!" said the officer brutally. "But if you want this man to be caught, you'll have to tell it *now*!"

And as he spoke he bent over the bed and, with a quick movement, snatched a long stiletto from Carmen's sheer silk stocking. For a moment she stared at the glittering blade with a curious light in her eyes. Then she burst into a hysterical laugh that was horrible to hear.

"A toy Mr. Harrington bought while he was in Italy." She smiled, with a shrug of her shoulders. "Who would have thought I should use it—"

"How?" broke in the sergeant threateningly.

"To stab Mr. Brewster when he tried to kill *me* as he did Mr. Harrington!" she screamed at the officer.

A moan from the hallway told Ted that Doris had heard, but, forgetting her, he stepped brusquely to the sergeant's side.

"But you *didn't*—where is he?" Van Horn demanded, and, looking up, Carmen Castleton recognized him.

"How should I know—or care?" she answered with flashing eyes. "I wish I had struck deeper—then he would not have carried me off in that terrible car!"

Then she became hysterical, and even the sergeant realized that further questions were useless.

VI

ALICIA remained in the bedroom with Carmen while one of the officers telephoned for Dr. Hazeltine. But the others were standing in the big hall, talking in hushed tones, when the outer door opened and Nick Brewster walked in.

His face was smeared with grime and blood, and from the slashed left sleeve of his gray tweed coat a dark-red stain had spread. He seemed weak and dazed, and stared at the group before him with perplexity in his eyes—an uncomprehending, glassy look, in which consternation was mingled with horror.

His wife cried out in agony at the sight of him and the sergeant stepped forward to take his arm.

"Mr. Brewster," he began, "you are—"

"Now just a moment, officer!" Van Horn butted in. "You're surely not going to arrest a man on the testimony of a delirious woman—and besides, it's only fair to let Mr. Brewster tell his story—with the knowledge that *whatever he says may be used against him*."

He emphasized the words deliberately, and despite his half stupor, Nick seemed to sense their import. "I'm afraid I can't tell you much," he began wearily and staggered toward a chair. "It seems more like a nightmare than something I've been through—"

Van Horn poured a stiff drink from the decanter on the table and Brewster gulped it down; then he fished nervously for a cigarette before he tried to go on.

"You know," he said to the officer, "that I'd just equipped my car with a high-powered radio set. I didn't know whether or not it would work as I hoped—and I was eager to test it to-night. If it succeeded," he turned to Van Horn, "I'd have made a fortune—"

for I meant to *send* from the car as well as receive—later on."

His fingers trembled as he struck a match, but controlling himself with an effort, he managed to continue:

"I knew the ether would be full of waves, and in order to take advantage of the higher altitude, I ran the old roadster up past Harrington's place—"

He paused as he felt the tenseness in the room and grew conscious of the curious, almost doubting eyes that were concentrated upon him.

"Oh, yes," he said with a bitter laugh, "I heard Carmen's songs—through the radio on my windshield at first, and later with my own ears, when I stopped before the bungalow. Naturally, I was surprised, but I thought I'd drop in a moment and went up on the porch. Carter was at the table, with the headpiece of his set clamped to his ears, and Carmen"—he paused and looked toward his wife—"Carmen was standing with her back to me, listening to some dance music that was coming through Harrington's amplifier."

No one spoke, and after a nervous swallow, he tossed away his cigarette and went on:

"Then a terrific explosion came directly behind me. Harrington cried out and sprang to his feet—yelling for help and shouting out his call letters. Then I heard another shot—for it must have been that—and Carter crumpled up in a heap. I was halfway into the room, and Carmen turned on me like some maddened tigress. I saw her reach for her stocking, and I caught a flash as her hand shot out—and she stuck a long knife into me—here."

He indicated the arm which he could not move and the growing stain on his clothes, but only the sergeant broke the silence:

"What then?"

"I don't know," answered Harrington lamely. "I went cold—and the next

think I knew I was halfway down the mountainside, lying in the middle of the roadway. If a car had passed it might have run over me and finished me then and there—but after a time I got to my feet—and well—*somehow*—I'm here."

For a moment he sat staring at them. Then he rose and held out his hands appealingly. "Do you mean that you don't believe me—that you think—I *killed Harrington?*" he cried incredulously. "You *can't* think I'm a rotter like that!"

And he sat weakly back in his chair, but the sergeant of police was totally unconvinced. He had Carmen Castleton's story and this tale seemed silly to him.

"Mr. Brewster," he said somewhat gruffly, "you're under arrest—on the charge of homicide—assault and battery—and attempted abduction of the lady in the next room."

VII

DR. HAZELTINE had finished dressing Brewster's wound and had confirmed Carmen's statement that she had caused it with the stiletto the police sergeant retained. Carmen was sleeping at last in Doris' boudoir, and Mrs. Brewster herself was sobbing in another room, with Alicia by her side.

Nick sat in an easy chair in the darkened living-room, while Ted Van Horn stood by the hearth, peering speculatively into the dying fire. Brewster did not even seem aware of the fact that the others had gone, and he paid no attention to the man in uniform, smoking a pipe as he lounged on a bench at the opposite side of the room.

Van Horn and the others from the camp had tried to arrange for bail, but it had been promptly refused and Nick remained in custody, although still in his home. It was after four, and at any

time the police motor would come to take him to West Farmington for a hearing scheduled for seven.

Nick's head was swathed in bandages and his face was covered with plasters, but the physician had said that the knife wound was not a serious one. The hurt on the back of his head might have been caused by a blow—or what was more likely, the sergeant thought, when he was hurled from the car from which Carmen had also been thrown. Of course the dust and dirt which littered the bungalow would afford ample opportunity for the taking of fingerprints, but nothing much could be done for the remainder of the night, and everyone was impatient for the coming of the dawn.

A grandfather's clock in the corner struck the half hour, and Nick aroused himself from his trance with a start. Outside they could hear the arrival of a car and the tread of heavy-shod feet on the porch.

Van Horn swung about on his heel with a sigh of relief. At least it would be easier when they were on their way. Counsel were motoring from town with all speed, and before nightfall Nick's case would be in good hands—yet Van Horn stared at his friend with a sort of pity not unminged with a feeling of keen disappointment.

Then the door opened, and an officer walked in with Dick Duars and Emlyn Warren, still in their airplane togs.

"Say!" Duars began, catching sight of Van Horn, "Emlyn and I took a car after we put up the flyer, and went over to look at the wreck of Nick's radio-sending roadster. And we found something which may be interesting—"

As he spoke, another officer came into the room, pushing before him a sullen-looking man in a blue serge suit and a nondescript cap. "This bird was nosing about Nick's busted buggy, as though

that wireless attachment tickled him stiff."

"Can't a man look at a freak thing like that without getting pinched for it?" the stranger demanded surlily.

"A cat may look at a king, old top," Duars reminded him, "but snooping about smashed speedcars in the middle of the night requires an explanation."

The officer in charge of the man turned to the sergeant, and came to a salute. "Says he's on a hike for his vacation," the policeman explained; "but he hasn't any kit or camp—"

"What's your name?" the sergeant demanded. Other questions followed.

Nick seemed hardly cognizant of what was taking place. With a bored air, as though resenting the intrusion, Van Horn tapped restlessly with his foot upon the fender before the fire.

The prisoner seemed belligerent, and was somewhat confused in his answers to the sergeant's questions. At one of them, a smile passed momentarily over Van Horn's face. Then he began kicking the fender again. This time, what he had hoped for happened suddenly.

"It's a damned lie!" yelled the man who claimed to be on a hike. "I didn't—"

"Didn't what?" asked Van Horn casually, looking him full in the face with a glint of amusement in his eyes.

"What you just kicked out on that iron in the International Code!" came the angry reply. "You think you're a smart Alec, don't you?"

"At least I suspected that you might understand that code," Van Horn said meaningly. "And I was right, at that. Now, suppose you take your hands out of your pockets!"

"What for?" snarled the man in the cap.

"Because I want to see your right one," Van Horn told him. "If you don't show it to me I'll ask the officer—"

"Well, look at it!" shouted the pris-

oner furiously. "What's the matter with it?"

The memory of a burned and blistered surface beneath the throw-switch of Harrington's radio set impressed itself upon Teddy Van Horn's mind. He seemed to picture *this* man throwing that switch in haste as he heard the aerial posse crying at his heels; and in a flash he saw how the murderer of Harrington had burned the fingers and palms of his right hand by carelessly exposing it to the heavily charged switch-wires.

"It's a marvel," Van Horn mused aloud, "how you escaped with your life, when you ran Mr. Brewster's car into that boulder."

"The guy's crazy!" snickered the man in the cap, turning to the sergeant with a look of hatred smouldering in his eyes. "He thinks—"

"I'm not going to *think* any longer," Van Horn promised him, and walked quickly to the door of Doris' boudoir. He knocked once; then pushed it open, and called out in a quiet tone:

"Carmen—can you step in here a moment, please?"

Even Nick was watching him wonderingly, and there was a dead pause until Carmen Castleton's figure was framed in the doorway. For an instant she stood there like a statue, her hands clutching the frame, and then the color fled from her cheeks and her scream aroused the women in the adjoining room.

"Oh!" she moaned, wringing her hands. "It is too terrible! I never

dreamed that he would follow me! He *threatened*—but it seemed so droll I could not think him serious."

She swayed and seemed about to faint, and the man in the cap sprang forward like some trapped animal, in a desperate attempt to escape. But the two policemen had him handcuffed in an instant, and his gesture had revealed to them the hiding-place of the missing automatic their first hasty search had failed to find.

"Suppose," said Van Horn quietly to Carmen, "suppose you tell the sergeant just *who* this fellow is."

"The wireless operator from the ship!" she explained, drawing away from the struggling man. "At first he was so nice and told me all about his wireless machines. Then he tried to make love to me, and I told him I was engaged. Oh, how *could I know* he would try to do such a thing! The foolish things he said were too absurd to *believe!*"

With a moan of remorse she ran across the room and threw herself upon her knees at Brewster's feet. "Nick!" she pleaded miserably, "how can I *ever* explain! Of course you wouldn't kill poor Carter and carry me off—"

"Don't!" Brewster soothed her, and put both hands on the shaking shoulders as she buried her head in his lap. "Don't say any more about it, Carmen." Then, looking up at his wife, standing with Alicia in the doorway of the other room, he smiled at her happily, and said very quietly: "Look after her, won't you, Doris? She needs you."



Her Friend, the Burglar

By Parker Howard



I T H a
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D o r i s

Lawton reluctantly hid the fascinating style-book in the drawer of her typewriter desk. It alluringly offered "the latest Fifth avenue fashions, direct from designer to you, without the trouble and expense of a shopping trip to the city."

Doris sighed as she assaulted the keys of her machine. She copied her notes mechanically, with never a thought of the sense of what she was typing.

"It's positive cruelty to females to offer flapper finery so reasonably," she mused; "especially when said females don't happen to have the price!"

Doris did not happen to have anywhere near that sum. Shoes and stockings and silken things—dresses and parasols—hats and handkerchiefs—and a vanity-case! Doris needed them all.

Here it was July and she had been able to save almost nothing against the sunshiny days of her approaching vacation. Of course, the three weeks' salary she would receive before leaving the office, would pay her board and railroad fare to and from the modest resort she had chosen. But there was practically nothing for clothes—and without clothes, Doris felt, she might just as well stay at home.

For months she had practiced countless little economies and the strictest self-denial. But her salary was smaller

than the small town in which she was employed and the net result was discouraging. Butterfly luncheons, instead of the nourishing grub her health demanded, had fattened her purse but little more than her body, and she found her wardrobe all too slender for the requirements of dances and drives and beach and boating parties.

Her deep blue eyes habitually flashed a keen intelligence, but now they were on the verge of tears, and the cupid's bow of her lips was distorted into a pout. It was unfair, she felt. Only the day before, she had drawn a number of checks from the private check-book of her boss to pay milliners and modistes and specialty shops for the wealth of wearing apparel his wife and daughter had ordered.

There was nothing of the bolshevist about Doris. Mr. Kenyon was a rich man and it was only right that he should be generous with his family. Yet it did seem hard that they should have so much, when she required, comparatively, so little.

Bravely she tried to put the idea out of her head, and for several minutes her slender fingers hammered at the keys industriously. Then she made sure there were no mistakes in her mail, and, gathering the letters and envelopes into a neat pile, went toward the private office.

And all of a sudden her heart went pit-a-pat. A half smile crept over her pretty features and almost as quickly faded as she hesitated outside the frosted glass door. Was she a coward, she wondered—would she have the

nerve? And if she had, she pondered, what would the boss say?

In all probability his answer would be no—yet Doris remembered the proverb “nothing venture, nothing gain.” It was worth taking a chance, she felt, and she also reminded herself that faint heart never won fine feathers. Yes, she would ask him!

Timidly she stepped inside and closed the door behind her. The green-shaded desk-lamp was burning at her employer’s elbow, and she was conscious of a frown on his weary face.

It was not a propitious moment to ask a favor, but Doris told herself that it must be now or never. If she quailed this time, she would never have the courage to approach him again.

“Thank you,” he said as she put her work in his wire basket. Then he looked at his watch and saw it was after six.

Doris hesitated. He was evidently in a hurry, yet something within her urged her to go on.

“Mr. Kenyon,” she began in a half faltering voice, “I was wondering whether—”

“Yes?” he snapped, beginning to sign his name.

“Whether the firm would lend me fifty dollars—and take it out of my salary after vacation?”

He did not look up.

“What for?” came the abrupt question.

“Some things I need—” she explained lamely without desiring to go into detail.

“Things you *don’t* need!” he contradicted. “You girls are all alike. All you think of is making a big splurge during the two weeks of your holiday. In order to do it you’re willing to keep your powdered noses to the grindstone for the rest of the year. No, Miss Lawton, the firm won’t lend you fifty dollars—or fifty cents!”

He pushed the last letter from him and, rising impatiently, took his hat

from the clothes pole. In another moment the door closed behind him and Doris found herself standing there, folding and sealing his letters from force of habit.

“The old grouch!” she exclaimed bitterly, and then her sense of humor came to the rescue. “Doris Lawton, you’re a goose!” she charged herself. “He suspected what you wanted right away. No wonder—after all those bills he had to pay for his wife’s and daughter’s things. He *can’t* say no to them—so he says just that to you!”

She was right. Walking down the paved stretch which divided the lawn in front of the office, Kenyon felt that perhaps he had been a little unfair. In fact he hesitated an instant, almost tempted to go back and tell the girl she might have the sum she wished. Then he shook his head.

“She’ll be disappointed, of course, but it’s better not to let her have it. Lord! Eighteen dollars a week, and she wants to borrow half a hundred to blow on foolishness! Nix!”

II

DORIS was disappointed, but somehow she felt no resentment as she went out into the deserted main office and put on her saucy hat. Deep down in her heart she knew that she could not afford even a small selection from that tempting style book—yet she had looked forward to the approaching vacation weeks so eagerly. She liked nice things and she loved to meet pleasant people, and the really nice girls at the resort would have trunkfuls of pretty apparel.

“Oh, well,” she sighed, “if he won’t he won’t—so that’s all of that! I suppose I’ll have to make out with what I have.”

Then she saw Kenyon’s check-book and a number of personal papers lying on her desk. The safe had been locked

for the night when the bookkeeper departed, but Doris knew its combination and it would not do to leave these things exposed to possible loss. So she turned the knob of the vault built into the wall, and, switching on the electric light, went in to put the check-book and papers in Kenyon's private drawer.

The day had been warm and the windows were still open in the main office. A storm had been gathering for more than an hour, and now a sharp gust blew violently into the room.

Doris was just turning the light switch when she heard the steel door of the vault, swinging smoothly on its hinges, close with a clang. With a startled exclamation she sprang toward it—just too late. It locked automatically and there was no way to open it from the inside.

Standing in the stuffy darkness of the little compartment, she tried to think for a moment. Everyone had gone except Stephen, the janitor. He would be passing through the isolated little building in a few minutes, closing the windows and setting the burglar alarm. Seeing the safe closed, he would assume that everyone had departed, and it would not be long before Stephen himself would go home to his supper.

Filled with a sudden fear, she began to call out wildly, and beat with her bare hands on the unyielding door. There was a chance that the janitor might hear her. But the vault was practically sound proof, and besides, old Stephen was slightly deaf.

The burglar alarm made a night-watchman unnecessary, and unless she could summon aid within a mighty short time, Doris knew she was a prisoner until morning.

Her polished nails broke as she clawed at the lock barrier. She pressed her ear eagerly against its surface, hoping in vain to catch some encouraging sound from without. But the only noise in

the stilled vault was her convulsive breathing and the frantic pounding of her terrified heart.

Despairing at last of summoning aid, she groped her way in the darkness until she found the light switch. It turned with a little click, but no illumination followed. For a moment she wondered why, and then she understood. Even through the brick and steel of the walls she could faintly hear the crash and rumble of the thunderstorm. Evidently the electricity had been put out of order by the violence of the static disturbance.

For a little while she cried, hysterically, and then tried to laugh at herself; but she made rather a sorry attempt at that. It was frightfully hot in the vault, and suddenly she remembered reading of men who had been suffocated in similar situations.

A feeling of horror enveloped her. She did not want to die, yet she felt miserably helpless. There was literally nothing that she could do but wait—and as she sank down in a huddled heap beside the immovable steel shutter, she breathed a little prayer. Then, sometime in the long, measureless interval which followed, she lost consciousness.

III

As though in a dream, Doris heard a clicking sound amid the stillness. It meant nothing to her now, and her body and mind were numbed with an overpowering drowsiness. One shoulder was propped up by the vault door, and her bobbed head rested against it, her chin upon her breast.

There was a faint current of air, and the support against which she leaned gave way. Her eyes half opened—then closed again—and Doris fell forward, with her body prostrate across the threshold of the safe-deposit chamber.

Vaguely, as though it were far away, she heard a masculine ejaculation of astonishment. It seemed as though a tiny shaft of light were prying into her face, but it faded as her eyes opened again, and she could see nothing but the shadowy outlines of the desks and furniture of the office.

For a time she knew nothing at all. Then, raising herself on her elbow, she became aware of someone moving inside the vault.

There was *someone* standing close to her! She could hear quick breathing and the scraping sound of file cases being opened and shut. The little shaft of white light was also playing inside the big safe.

Somewhat indistinctly, Doris saw a hand draw a bundle from a drawer. Then the searchlight snapped off again, and she felt a desire to scream. A dark figure was bending over her, and now a hand touched her wrist. It lingered a moment, as though feeling her pulse, and then rested directly over her heart.

"Narrow squeeze," she heard a voice murmur. "She'll be all right though, now that the door's open."

The figure rose and stepped from the vault, pausing only a moment in the outer office. "Lucky all around!" she caught an amused chuckle, and shuddered lest the man—for it must be a man she heard—should approach her again. Surely he could not think her dead, but he evidently meant to leave her there as she was without even giving first aid. That could only mean that he was thoroughly unscrupulous. As consciousness fully returned, she considered herself lucky that he did not attempt to harm her.

But even in that moment, despite her apprehension, she was stirred by the loyalty she owed to Mr. Kenyon. Forgotten for the moment was his refusal to lend her the money for which

she had asked—unthought of was the danger of her position, alone in the building with this burglar. If she could only get to the telephone switchboard and give the warning of his presence! And then she wondered why the burglar alarm had not notified the Police Department.

In a flash, she understood. The storm that had put out the lights must have disconnected the system. Otherwise, the raised window, which she could see at the opposite end of the room, would have sent the message of the man's entrance over the wires.

Cautiously, and scarcely daring to breathe, Doris sat up. Steadying herself with one hand, she attempted to rise. Just what she was going to do, she was not sure, but that she *must* do something was certain. If she could prevent it, the thief should not get away with whatever he had taken. She did not think there was much of negotiable value in the vault—only a little petty cash and some bonds and stock certificates belonging to Mr. Kenyon.

But—it suddenly dawned upon Doris—that this made it all the worse. The theft of those securities might direct suspicion at her. The thought made her cry aloud without considering the consequences—and they followed swiftly.

"Keep still!" came the peremptory command, and again she saw the white finger of light point in her direction. It blinded her and she blinked her eyes. Evidently she made a sorry picture, for a laugh sounded unpleasantly as the rays of the pocket-light illumined her pale, frightened face.

"If you make a move I'll have to hurt you," the man went on. "I don't want to shoot unless you force me."

"Oh!" gasped Doris and cringed close to the floor.

"I don't know who you are, or what you were doing in that vault," continued the burglar. "I never knew that Ken-

yon was a Bluebeard and locked up ladies in his safe. But if I hadn't happened along when I did, to let you out, you'd have been a corpse by morning."

Doris shuddered and found herself unable to speak. She wanted to scream, but she could not, so completely was she paralyzed with dread.

"Just stay where you are and mind your own business," advised the man. "No one is coming along to disturb us. The storm helped me out with the safety signal, but I'd have put it out of business myself if chance hadn't done it. Now I'm going out by the way I came in, and if you know what's good for you, you'll keep still until I'm safely away. Then you can go or stay yourself—just as you please."

Doris did not know what to answer. She was trying in vain to formulate some plan—but her brain refused to work. It was too dark to see the man's face, and she could only make out his figure silhouetted against the light from the window. Perhaps he did not have a gun. He might be only bluffing, but even if he was, she knew she would be helpless in a struggle with him. He might strangle her or leave her bound hand and foot with a gag in her mouth, as she had seen crooks do to girls in the movies.

"Remember what I said," came the admonition, as the man backed slowly toward the window. "If you try any nonsense—even after I'm outside—I'll get you later on—no matter how long I have to wait." With a quiet laugh, he dropped out of sight.

Doris began to consider what she ought to do. There was the telephone board. Should she call the police or get her employer's home on the wire? Then the terrible truth impressed itself upon her. Would either the officers or Mr. Kenyon believe her? What excuse could she give for being there herself at such an hour?

The story she must tell—the real story of what had happened—would sound like simple invention and not very clever invention at that. Even if they should believe that the door of the vault had blown shut on her, there would be a lurking suspicion as to her motive for being in the compartment after it had once been locked and everyone had gone.

They probably would not accept her statement anyway. Stephen would naturally say that the safe had been closed when he had gone home. She had asked for fifty dollars, and had been refused. . . . She could not identify the burglar because she had not seen his face—and of course there would be nothing to help her prove that he had ever been there. Her story would probably be regarded as a clumsy effort to conceal her own theft of whatever had been taken from Kenyon's private drawer.

In sudden panic, she resolved to slip away, leaving everything as it was. She would go out just as the burglar had gone. She drew up her skirt and mounted the window-sill, then dropped the short distance to the grass beneath.

For a fraction of time she stood quaking in the shadow of the building, then, taking new courage from her very fear, she darted like a frightened fawn across the grounds and down to the narrow delivery street.

IV

THERE WAS NO sleep for Doris that night. It had been after three when she cautiously mounted the veranda steps of her lodging and inserted her key in the lock. With a feeling of guilt she had slipped off her French-heeled pumps and silently mounted the stairs in her stocking feet. Yet, despite her utmost caution, the rickety balustrade

creaked and groaned as she steadied herself against it, and she was not at all sure that her landlady was not well aware of the hour of her return.

In fact, when morning finally came, she was quite convinced that Mrs. Morris looked at her with disapproval. The hatchet-faced woman's suspicious eyes seemed to read the secret which was torturing the girl, and Doris gulped her breakfast with scant ceremony. But even then, she knew her ordeal had not really begun.

Her feet felt like lead as she entered the office. To her surprise it was empty. The safe was closed and locked, but the bookkeeper's desk was open, and while no one sat at the switch-board, the operator's hat hung on the peg above her chair.

Doris stood stock-still on the threshold, trying to get a grip on her shattered nerves. From the half-open door of Mr. Kenyon's office came the buzz of voices, and the instinct of flight grew strong in her.

Then Stephen, the janitor, came out of the sanctum, and eyed Doris as though he had seen a ghost. "Here's Miss Lawton now," he said over his shoulder, and from within, Mr. Kenyon called her.

She was face to face with the dreaded moment, and something told her that it was going to result unsatisfactorily. She was shaking like a leaf and her hands seemed to be enormous and totally useless. Somehow she managed to cross the outer office and step into the private room.

Kenyon was seated at his desk. Standing beside it was a policeman in uniform and a man Doris recognized as Collins, the local chief of police. Ranged about the walls were the other employees, and all of them scrutinized Doris with a look which brought a lump to her throat and made her fluttering heart sink within her.

"Take off your shoes!" came the sharp command of Chief Collins.

Doris turned to him in embarrassment. But before she could find words, the policeman stepped to her side, and, stooping, grasped her ankle. In an instant he had removed her high-heeled pump and placed it on Kenyon's desk.

"The little idiot!" exclaimed Mr. Kenyon. Still Doris did not understand. But it was not long before she did. The heel was smeared with mud, and it was quickly ascertained that its size corresponded precisely with the two indentations that showed all too plainly in the earth outside the window. When she had dropped from the ledge, both heels had embedded themselves deeply in the earth made soft by the downpour.

For an innocent girl to explain that manner of egress from the building was difficult in itself, and when Doris blurted out her story, she did it pitifully. Her voice was faltering and her choice of words unfortunate. In her dazed condition she contradicted herself, and she could not convincingly tell them why she had run away if she had nothing to hide.

"Some nerve," observed Chief Collins. "She thinks she can show up here this morning and throw a bluff that will fool us—when the whole case is as plain as the nose on your face. Wants to borrow money and gets turned down. Spiteful, she throws the mail in the waste-basket."

Doris gave a start as he indicated the receptacle which usually stood beside her desk. The wind that had blown the safe door shut must have swept the letters into the basket. She had forgotten them in her flight.

"Then she hides somewhere until the watchman leaves," Collins summed up. "She takes the bond and then tries to make the whole thing look like a burglary. I've heard of amateur crooks do-

ing a lot of fool things, but this is the limit. With twenty thousand dollars worth of bonds in Mr. Kenyon's drawer, she only takes a single hundred-dollar one!"

There was a snicker from those gathered about, but Kenyon nodded his head understandingly. "Just petty spite," he observed. "Probably figured that I'd never miss one out of the packet, eh?"

"Naturally," pointed out Chief Collins, "a regular yegg wouldn't have been so modest. He'd have taken the lot. A hundred-dollar bond wouldn't pay him for his pains."

Then Doris found her tongue, and a flame of fury surged within her. "It's not true!" she asserted, her eyes blazing as she confronted them. "You're quick to jump at conclusions, but if I'd wanted to take that one little bond myself, why would I have called attention to it by leaving the safe door open and jumping out the window?"

"Ask me something easy!" chuckled the police chief.

"What did you *do* with that bond?" Kenyon put to her severely.

"I didn't *take* it!" she protested desperately, and the tears streamed down her cheeks. "I tell you I *didn't*—and I don't know *where* it is!"

"Then," announced Chief Collins, "I guess you'd better come along with me until your memory's clearer."

V

STUNNED, and overwhelmed with shame, Doris sat in the little cell of the local police station. She had been pedigreed and docketed like any other criminal, and in the eyes of the officers and everyone at the office, she was nothing but a contemptible little thief. Nor was there any means by which she could prove an alibi—no way that she could clear herself of the charge.

It was not alone the vision of impending

imprisonment that sickened her. It was the fact that they thought her a *thief*—that never again could she look them in the face or walk abroad on the streets. Wherever she might go that stigma would be certain to follow her.

In speechless rage she had been forced to endure being searched by the station-house matron, and she knew that the police had gone through her belongings at home. Her landlady was aware of the charge against her, and had said, as Doris supposed that she would, that her lodger had not returned until the wee hours of the morning.

By this time the town was talking of what had happened. The fact that Doris had held aloof from the local maidens and swains—because of her diffidence in making new friends—only aggravated the sneering spirit in which they received the news. Already she was convicted on circumstantial evidence, and she felt she would soon be wearing a frock of a style she had not coveted.

Then, to make matters worse, Mrs. Kenyon called at the jail. She was a well-meaning woman, although somewhat unfortunate in her manner. Yet she was genuinely concerned over Doris' case, and had come to the station-house despite her husband's expression of disapproval.

"Why don't you confide in me, my child?" she had asked of Doris. "The money in itself isn't such a serious matter—but what you have done may ruin your whole life unless you act sensibly and make a clean breast of it."

For a moment Doris looked at the richly gowned woman with an expression of fury in the depths of her eyes. Yes, it *might* ruin her whole life—yet she *had* made a clean breast of it—and by so doing had incriminated herself. Did they want her to lie—to confess something she had not done—in order to earn their clemency?

"Mr. Kenyon told me of your request for a loan," Mrs. Kenyon went on. "I can realize the temptation which dress must hold for a girl in your position—"

But Doris interrupted her angrily. "Can you?" she cried contemptuously. "I wonder if you can! And I wonder if you could resist it if you did. But I tell you I didn't take the money—that every word I've said is true—and I'm not going to admit something that isn't so, no matter what you promise to do if I should."

In disgust at the brazenness of the girl, Mrs. Kenyon took her departure, and Chief Collins himself escorted her to the motor in which her daughter was waiting.

"It is really too bad," she deplored to the official. "She is so young to be so stubborn, and so callous, yet I suppose we must expect it in view of the modern attitude of young girls toward lavish adornment and enjoyment of luxuries beyond their means."

But Chief Collins knew more about human nature than Mrs. Kenyon did, and his experience was wider with young men and women who had made similar slips because of their envy of others more fortunate in worldly possessions. So he walked meditatively back into the station house, and with a friendly light in his eyes paused before the bars of the cell in which Doris was sitting dejectedly, her burning cheeks hidden in the palms of her quivering hands.

"Now don't take on like that, kid," he consoled her gently. "Maybe things won't be so bad after all."

"I hate—all of you!" Doris blurted out, unable to control her emotion.

"Sure you do," agreed the Chief. "That's only natural. We all hate people who catch us doing something we oughtn't to do—"

"I tell you I didn't—" raged Doris.

"And I tell you you did," contradicted

the Chief calmly. "We won't fight over that—but I'll tell you how you can keep on sticking to the truth and get out of this little cage—"

Doris looked up at him in astonishment, but the official's eyes were twinkling.

"You didn't spring anything new," he said. "Did you think you did?"

"I don't understand," stammered Doris.

"No?" queried the Chief, arching his eyebrows. "Suppose you tell me the name of the young man who was working with you, and explain what frightened you both away before you'd completed the haul."

So *that* was what he thought! Doris realized in an instant why she was being held, and it only increased her helplessness—for she did not know the burglar, and could not even attempt to explain what he looked like. That in itself, she saw, only made it seem as though she was trying to shield the man they believed to be her accomplice.

"He was foxier than you," the Chief told her, "for he wore gloves and rubber-soled shoes, but we found his footprints in the grass the same as yours. Now you're too good a kid to tie up with a crook like that—a contemptible skunk who'll slink away and leave a silly girl to get caught in his place. Come on—out with it! Where'll we find him?"

Doris could only protest that she did not know.

"Well, all I've got to say," was Chief Collin's parting shot, "you're about as senseless a little fool as I ever came across; if you won't loosen your tongue—you deserve what's coming to you."

VI

WHEN Doris closed her eyes she seemed to live again all that had taken place, and she found herself wondering

what *had* become of the burglar. She imagined that she felt his touch again, and once more seemed to shrink from him in fear. In the silence of the jail his very voice sounded again in her ears. She found herself despising the man as much as she loathed herself—for surely she had not been as cowardly as he. Yet she was going to jail because of him.

Then she remembered his observation that if he had not happened in, she might have suffocated in the safe. After all, he *had* saved her life, and perhaps she ought to be thankful.

She ceased to puzzle over it, and her weariness lulled her off to sleep—a dreamless, exhausted slumber, from which she was awakened by the opening of her cell door.

There was a bright light in the corridor, and by it she recognized the Chief of Police with a turnkey by his side.

"Awake?" he asked. "Well, kid, I've good news for you. Your old boss has changed his mind and withdrawn the charge. You can thank your brother for that—"

"My brother?" asked Doris in a daze, blinking at the electric light and trying to concentrate. She had no brother, so it must be the burglar who had assumed the role. But perhaps this was another trap to get her to speak. So she kept very still and listened with ears that could hardly believe what she heard.

Chief Collins nodded. "I don't know whether the story's on the level or not, but since Kenyon's promised not to prosecute, there's nothing to do but let you go."

"Do you mean that?" Doris asked eagerly, springing to her feet in a flutter.

"Yes," said the Chief. "Your 'brother' got hold of an early afternoon edition of the *Call* and telephoned to Kenyon that he'd make good the hundred dollars if he'd withdraw the

charge. At first the old man declined to do it, but your 'brother' sent the cash anyway—by a messenger who said he'd been given it by a stranger who paid his railway fare from Westport and gave him a ten-dollar tip."

Despite her emotion, Doris could not help smiling. There must be honor among thieves after all, and the hurglar was not so much of a cad as she had thought him.

"But that isn't all," Collins went on, "and there's one other thing I wish you *would* explain, even though I've no official right to ask you now."

"What?" asked Doris, quite as curious as the Chief seemed to be.

"Why the devil did you hide that hundred-dollar bond in the safe?" came the perplexed question.

"Hide it?" repeated Doris.

"Exactly," nodded the Chief. "The bookkeeper found it this afternoon, in the bin with the old letter-press books, under the cabinet where Kenyon kept his securities. He wouldn't have discovered it if he hadn't been looking up some old correspondence."

"I've *told* you," said the bewildered girl, "that I don't know a thing about it."

"Well, maybe you do, and maybe you don't," grinned Chief Collins, "but it's because that bond was found that Kenyon decided not to appear against you. Of course, we couldn't convict you now anyway, but I'm not so sure that it's wise to turn you loose. Just bear in mind, young lady, that it's a risky business for a kid like you to arrange to meet your 'brother' after midnight near a safe-deposit vault. Next time you do it, you may get locked in another kind of a chamber."

VII

TEN minutes later, Doris was making her way through side streets to her

boarding-house. There was enough money in the purse the police restored to her to pay her bill at Mrs. Morris' and then slip out of town. Where she would go or what she would do she did not know. Just now her only thought was not to be seen.

Doris was angry through and through. Mrs. Kenyon's attitude at the jail still rankled in her breast. The memory of the Police Chief's words also nettled her. He, too, believed her guilty. And old Kenyon had only refused to prosecute because he knew he could not secure a conviction. She hated them all—hated the town and the job she had lost as well.

Hearing her enter the boarding-house, the landlady stepped into the hall and glared at Doris in speechless amazement. "I thought you was in jail!" she sneered.

"I'm a lady Jonah and came out of the whale again," Doris said, more amused than annoyed at the absurdly belligerent attitude of the woman.

"You've sure been a jonaah to me!" bemoaned Mrs. Morris. "To think that a woman o' my reputation—runnin' a respectable house for years—should get herself advertised the way I've been today."

"I suppose, now that you're a notorious character, you'll be going into the movies," Doris taunted. Opening her purse, she took out its slender store of bills. "I'm leaving—tonight," she explained. "Here is what I owe you—"

"Till the end of next week," Mrs. Morris reminded her avariciously. "This money ain't—"

"No, it's *not* stolen!" Doris flared. "If you dare suggest such a thing, I'll forget that you're an ugly old woman and slap your face. You're just like the rest of the rubes in this burg. Your ideas are so narrow your brains could be shoved through the eye of a needle without touching its sides!"

Mrs. Morris gasped, but subsided, and tucked the money away in her apron. "Oh, I forgot," she said in an altered tone; "a little boy was here a while ago with a letter for you."

She produced a bulky missive and stared at it with all-consuming curiosity. But Doris snatched it from her quickly and ran up the stairs to her room. Once behind the locked door, she lit the gas and sat down wearily on the edge of the bed. The writing on the envelope in her hand was not familiar.

Then, curiously, her fingers ripped open the flap—and into her lap tumbled a package of bills!

Doris stared at them with unbelieving eyes—but the crisp feel of the bank-notes told her the money was real—and she turned her attention to the writing. The letter was not signed, but she saw at once that it was from the burglar.

Say, Kid, I'm sorry you got juggled for the day, but maybe this little remembrance will make up for that a little bit. If you'd only squealed when I beat it, you wouldn't have been pinched. But you were GAME—and I've always been a square crook. I'm strong for a good sport—and specially when she's a little pippin like you! You see, Kid, I didn't have the nerve to take anything out of the office vault after I found you there. I didn't want you to get the blame, so I put the bonds back and the cash wasn't worth taking anyway.

Doris paused and a smile came over her face. All the honest folks thought her beyond the pale, but the burglar-man was lavish in his praise, and generous in his appreciation!

After, I made my getaway, I got to thinking what an old skinflint Kenyon is. Nobody but his wife

and daughter ever pried him loose from a cent. And I sort of figured that maybe you were monkeying about that safe because you needed a little extra change yourself. So I beat it over to Kenyon's home and took a look in the safe in his library. Say—the old boy had \$1,000 in there! So I just lifted it and closed the safe again, and I don't suppose he even knows it's gone.

Doris gave a little gasp, and then her eyes twinkled as she thought of Kenyon's fury when he should learn the truth. Of course there was nothing more he could do with her, but she did not care to be in town when he made the discovery. He would be mad enough to chew nails for days to come. She went on with the note:

When I found you'd been locked up, I worked that "brother" stunt; and because Kenyon would do anything for a hundred dollars, he fell

for it hard. Of course he didn't know it was his own century note I sent him by messenger. Too bad—but he wouldn't see the joke. I'm enclosing four hundred dollars. That's your half of the swag—less the hundred iron men it took to get you out of jail. Take it and have a good time. You didn't steal it. It's a gift from your admiring friend, the Burglar.

For a minute or two, Doris hesitated. Then she stuffed the note and the bills into her stocking and began to pack up. Four hundred dollars would buy a lot of the things in that mail-order catalog and give her a longer vacation at the shore.

There was a train out of town at eleven fifty-six, and Doris proposed to take it. But as she went about her preparations, she wondered whether the burglar would, by any chance, be at the seaside hotel. It would be fun if they could laugh together over the joke on old Kenyon.



Actors Amuse Me

By Charles G. Shaw

ACTORS amuse me.

Actors who wear ties, having white borders, with their dinner coats . . . actors who continually talk about their Art . . . actors who don't know what to do with their hands . . . actors who write their own plays . . . actors who insist upon speaking atrocious French . . . actors who are murdered in the first act and are espied sipping near-beer in the joint around the corner during the intermission . . . actors who behave instead of acting . . . actors who play female parts . . . actors who are always in the world's worst plays . . . actors who, having struck an attitude downstage, turn their backs to the audience and inaudibly mumble their main speech . . . actors who fancy themselves "matinée idols" . . . actors who play the part of Lord Illingworth in the manner of a floorwalker . . . actors who resort to false noses, scarlet waistcoats, size fourteen shoes and shaving soap to produce a snicker . . . actors who are always telling long-winded anecdotes about themselves . . . actors who appear in plays in which the hero, bound and gagged by the villain's accomplices, is freed by a squad of fearless Marines twenty seconds before the final curtain. . . .



The Dimpled Dumb-Bell

By Helen Hyself

TRIP HAGAR regained his balance and stared at the bald-headed man who had pushed him away from the limousine door. The man was undoubtedly old, and even his white mustache appeared feeble as it drooped dejectedly over his thin, loose lips. Yet it was he, the owner of the car, and not the athletic-looking chauffeur who had thrust Trip aside.

Hagar was not in the habit of lurking about rich men's limousines. His business—or perhaps it might better be called a profession in this day of specialization—had to do with those same rich men when not accompanied by chauffeurs or other paid protectors.

Trip was a hold-up man of discrimination and distinction. He worked at night. This afternoon he had merely paused to roll a cigarette and was gazing absently at the blue-and-gold monogram on the door of the car when the owner came out of the Hotel Gregory and crossed the sidewalk.

There was no room for surprise or anger in Trip's eyes as he stared through the window of the car as it moved slowly away. He wanted, if possible, to catch another glimpse of the blue-green stone that adorned the old man's left hand.

Trip knew a dealer in antique jewelry who would pay in the neighborhood of five thousand dollars for the Minibilh, the historic turquoise that had ornamented a Shah of Persia in the year 1688.

Trip believed he had recognized this valuable jewel on the hand that had

thrust him so roughly away from the limousine.

"Who was that guy?" he asked of the grinning doorman at the Hotel Gregory. "Some punch—considering."

He gazed ruefully after the receding car and reflected that the man was probably too old to live through the shock of being held up and robbed. No doubt his heart was weakened by age.

The doorman continued to grin. "That's Darius Blanding—his married daughter lives here." He interrupted his explanation to laugh. "Sort of surprised you, didn't he? Well, you never can tell about these old boys with the young ideas. They—"

But Trip had sudden important business at the Public Library.

His alert-young-business-man stride led straight to the big reading-room on the third floor of the building. Fifteen minutes, and he had freshened his memory as to the history of a certain turquoise pictured in the volume he had requested at the desk. He had also discovered that the stone was now in the collection of Darius Blanding.

Once more in Fifth Avenue, Trip strolled contemplatively in the sunshine. In the back of his busy mind danced the waxy luster of a bluish-green oval, dark and exquisitely colored and set in dull bronze. The ring was worth five thousand dollars to Berlitz, the antique jeweler, and Trip wanted the five thousand.

A hold-up was impractical and dangerous. Trip was careful to select his victims for their appearance of health as

well as of wealth. House-breaking was equally impractical and dangerous. The ring had an air of permanence upon the man's finger, as though it were seldom removed. And burglars are notorious for their habit of staying as far as possible from the householder they desire to rob.

Besides, Trip did not know a burglar he could trust, and he was determined to secure the greatest possible amount of the five thousand dollars for himself.

His walk carried him once more past the door of the Hotel Gregory.

Trip ignored the doorman but recalled his grinning, philosophic remarks concerning old men with young ideas. Immediately, the problem was solved. Trip darted into the hotel and telephoned an invitation for dinner to Dora Dell.

Dora was delighted. Dora was always delighted when Trip condescended to notice her. But Trip didn't condescend often. In his estimation, Dora was a dumb-bell. No amount of fluttering eyelids and dimpling smiles could counteract the fact that she was scatter-brained.

However, Dora was young, and exactly the type who could obtain the turquoise from Blanding through sentimental channels.

Pretty in a vain and vapid way, Dora believed that she was clever enough to be useful. And so she was, up to a certain point. Unfortunately, trouble was very likely to begin where her pictorial usefulness ceased.

Trip had met some of this trouble and vanquished it a few months before, and had declared himself finished with Dora. He had, at that time, acquired a large amount of incriminating evidence against her. Therefore, Trip felt equal to the task of dismissing Dora before she put her small mind to work on

improving his plan for obtaining the turquoise.

"The old guy looks easy," he told her as they finished their dinner at Chin Low's restaurant. "All you have to do is follow him around until he notices you—and any man with half an eye would notice you—"

Dora flashed him a smile and dimpled delightedly. Trip frowned and went on with his instructions:

"Your job is to get him to let you wear the ring while you eat somewhere. Ber—a jeweler I know—is all set to make a duplicate of it the minute he sees the color of the stone and the bronze. He's had the measurements for years and he can carry the color in his eye."

"My eyes are bluer than any turquoise that ever grew," dimpled Dora; "you told me that the first time you saw me."

"Ancient history," snapped Trip. "You're to keep me posted as to where you're going with the old boy and I'll have Ber—, my friend, go there, too. All he needs is one little glimpse and the thing's done."

"My, you're getting handsome, Trip," said Dora. "I never saw you—"

"Cut out the mush stuff, this is business!" Trip was finding it increasingly difficult to be patient with Dora and her dimpled flirtatiousness. "Do you understand what you're to do?"

Dora nodded sulkily. Then a question occurred to her.

"How can a man carry a color in his eye?"

"That's his job," sighed Trip. "All you have to do is to get the ring for a minute and let him see it. After that's done, I'll tell you what to do next—"

"I didn't know turquoises were worth much," said Dora, forgetting to dimple. She could not think and flirt at the same time.

"You're a dumb-bell," Trip muttered.

"This ring is valuable. It's got seven pages of history in a book. Understand? All about how some Persian king found it at the bottom of an enchanted lake and—"

"How do you know this is the one?" inquired Dora as she searched for her powder-puff. "It sounds like a fairy-tale to me."

"How do I know you ask foolish questions?" demanded Trip. "Stop thinking, I'm weary."

"Oh," said Dora, and her eyelids fluttered ravishingly. "Then let's go somewhere and dance. I love to dance with you. You're so big and strong and—"

II

A WEEK later, Dora Dell was dimpling for the delight of Darius Blanding. She gazed happily about the Broadway restaurant to which she had begged prettily to be taken and where she would, when the time came, show Trip Hagar's "friend" the Shah's turquoise.

"The incongruity of our little dinner charms me, Miss Dora," said Darius Blanding in a pompously playful attempt to make conversation. "Your youth takes twenty years off my life."

Dora's eyelids fluttered as she sought for a suitable reply. She had enjoyed the anchovies and she liked the music, but she didn't like Blanding and she didn't understand half he said. She knew, however, that she was charming whether she talked or not, so she smiled and glanced at the turquoise ring on her companion's finger.

"Oh," she cried in childish pleasure. "You're wearing a ring exactly the color of my eyes!" She gazed upward that he might see the color of her eyes.

Darius Blanding allowed his thin lips to relax beneath the drooping mustache. "You're right," he smiled. "But this

stone is many centuries older than your eyes, my child."

Dora extended her hand across the table. "Is it an—an—antique?" she asked. "I'd love to touch something that is centuries old."

Blanding hesitated a moment, then slipped the ring from his finger and laid it in her pink palm.

"Be careful of it," he admonished sharply. "It's very valuable—extremely valuable. A Persian Shah once numbered it among his favorite jewels. I'm far from so exalted a ruler—though I'm probably much richer in dollars and cents—"

"Oh," murmured Dora, "are you rich?" She slipped the ring on the index finger of her right hand and proceeded to demolish a French pastry. "How much could you sell it for?"

"There has never been a more beautiful stone," said Blanding, "and it is priceless, so far as selling goes."

Dora dimpled and gurgled over the color of the turquoise and the oddness of the setting. "It must have cost you a lot," she said in an awed voice.

Darius Blanding frowned reminiscently, then smiled in triumphant recollection. "It cost the man who refused to sell me the stone his fortune and his life," he said.

Dora's eyes widened and she shuddered charmingly.

"How?" she whispered.

"He wouldn't sell it so—I—but a pretty little girl like you knows nothing of business. Suffice it to say that my financial power drove his firm to the wall, and he killed himself. I took the ring from his widow."

The expression on Blanding's face was not pleasant to see. Dora shuddered again and glanced across the polished dancing floor at a short, florid man who was endeavoring to catch her

attention. Gradually it came to her that this must be the antique jeweler who wanted to see the ring. For a moment she gazed questioningly into his eyes.

At a faint nod from the man, Dora cried, "Oh!" in well-simulated surprise, and sprang to her feet.

"There's an old friend of my uncle's," she murmured to her companion. "Excuse me a minute—" She darted away to show the ring to Trip's confederate.

"Is it the real one?" she demanded breathlessly as she held out her hand.

The short man rose quickly and, bowing low over her hand, smiled effusively. "Don't be so open about it," he said; "the old man's watching you like a hawk." To an observer across the room it would seem that he paid her a compliment.

Dora glanced over her shoulder and smiled bright reassurance to the deserted Blanding.

"How much is it worth?" she asked of the jeweler. "Trip said you could carry the color in your eye. Can you?"

"You'd better go back now," he advised shortly.

"How much is the ring worth?" insisted Dora. "A thousand dollars?"

Again the jeweler bowed over her hand, taking a last, lingering look at the turquoise on her index finger.

"At least a thousand," he assured her. "Now run along before you get into trouble. And make a date with the old boy for Wednesday evening. I'll have the fake finished by then."

Dora returned to her dinner, purring apologies. "I'm sorry I ran away like that," she said. "It wasn't nice and—just to prove I'm sorry, I'll let you take me somewhere—Wednesday evening."

"That will give me great pleasure, Miss Dora," said Blanding. "We'll take

a nice long drive—perhaps go out to my country place for dinner."

"Oh, Mr. Blanding, I—I couldn't—" Dora tried to look shocked and made a fairly convincing success of the attempt.

"Why?" asked Blanding indulgently.

"We'd be alone and—oh, I couldn't go to your country home—it wouldn't be—"

"Then we'll just drive around the city and—"

Dora paused upon the threshold of consent.

Blanding followed up his imagined advantage by a promise. "You may wear the Shah's favorite jewel as long as you are in the car," he added, and smiled in satisfaction as Dora agreed.

III

WITH the copy of the turquoise ring safely tucked away in the pocket of her trim blue-serge jacket, and the original glowing dully on the index finger of her right hand, Dora Dell sat in the limousine beside Darius Blanding on Wednesday evening.

Conversation had long since lapsed for want of kindred interests and no amorous advances had come to take the place of words. They had circled Central Park at least five times and Dora wondered why people talked of the beauty of New York's playground.

They had passed dozens of amorous couples in cabs, in motors and on foot. Dora wondered how it would seem to be kissed by a man who wore a long, drooping mustache. She wondered, too, how the jeweler could carry a color in his eye long enough to match the Shah's turquoise so perfectly that she couldn't have told them apart had she seen them together.

Her eyelids fluttered sleepily and she suppressed a frequently recurring yawn.

"I must go home in a little while," said Dora at last. "It's getting late."

Blanding started as though surprised at

her presence in the car. "It's nearly eleven o'clock," he said after a moment, and slipped his arm stiffly about Dora's waist. Dora sighed and allowed her head to rest briefly upon his shoulder.

"I was beginning to think you didn't like me," she said softly.

"Women, especially pretty women, are dangerous," said Blanding, and kissed her suddenly. His drooping mustache dragged unpleasantly across her lips and Dora forgot, for the moment, her rôle of siren. She thought only of her distaste for her ancient admirer and jerked away from him pettishly.

Darius Blanding was hurt. More, he was angry. He moved to the far corner of the seat and barked an order into the speaking tube at his elbow. The car swerved from the park and sped down Fifth Avenue toward the corner of Thirty-third Street.

Dora recalled the purpose of this ride and was instantly contrite. She dared not give this austere old man an imitation of his valuable turquoise, as long as he was displeased with her. He might take the precaution of examining it closely before he allowed her to leave the car at her corner.

She grew more and more nervous as the time of transfer drew nearer with the passing of the short blocks. Her faith in the perfection of the duplicate ring weakened. It didn't seem possible to her that a man could carry the exact color of the Shah's turquoise in his eye. It was such a queer color, too. But if she did not make the exchange tonight, Trip Hagar would insist that she try again and Dora didn't want to make another engagement with Blanding.

She moved insinuatingly to her companion's side and rubbed her powdered cheek against his black coat sleeve. She sighed softly and looked up into his face.

Blanding sat, stiffly erect, staring at the

athletic back of his chauffeur. Dora sighed again and glanced from the window. They were nearing her corner. In another minute—

She took the left hand of Darius Blanding and replaced it about her waist. "Even if you don't like me," she murmured as she dropped the genuine turquoise into her pocket, "there's your pretty ring." She slipped the duplicate ring upon his finger and gave his hand a tender pat of farewell. "I'm sorry I have to go home so early."

The car drew up to the curb and the chauffeur stood alertly beside the open door. Dora allowed her companion a veiled glimpse of her turquoise eyes and a flash of dimples as she stepped quickly to the street.

"It's been a nice ride," she said.

"Thank you," replied Blanding, "Good-bye." His tone was courteously cold and totally lacking in regret. He neither asked for her address nor suggested that she telephone him.

With a sigh of relief, Dora saw the car move away from the corner, carrying Darius Blanding out of her life. It hadn't been a nice ride and only the possession of the Shah's favorite jewel compensated for her trouble in making a temporary playmate of so old and tiresome a man. And, the moment she telephoned Trip Hagar of her success, she would have nothing but a paltry hundred dollars in return for the boredom of being pleasant to Darius Blanding.

Her small fist clutched protectingly about the ring and in her brain grew a plan whereby she could keep the ancient stone a little while. She stepped into a drug-store-telephone-booth and dropped a coin into the five-cent slot.

Dora's voice trembled as she gave the number of Trip's phone to the operator. She swallowed with difficulty when he answered.

"This is Dora," she managed to say. "I—" she faltered, fearful lest the untruth she was about to utter would not ring true.

"Well?" said Trip suspiciously.

"I—I didn't—" again she faltered, and Trip's suspicions crystallized into swift anger.

"You failed, I suppose," he bellowed. "I might have known you wouldn't have brains enough to carry through. You're the dumbest dumb-bell that—"

Dora didn't mind being called a "dumb-bell" ordinarily. But to be told, in all seriousness, that she wasn't clever enough to accomplish so simple a task as the exchange of the rings, had proved to be—

Dora's slow anger was aroused. Her cheeks flushed under the heavy coating of powder and she glared ferociously into the transmitter of the telephone.

"If that's the way you're going to talk, I won't do it at all," said Dora.

Trip deemed it wise to change his tactics. "Couldn't you make the trade to-night?" he asked more civilly. "It ought to have been easy in the dark and everything."

"It was easy," said Dora and smiled slyly as she recalled the manner of the exchange, "but I thought it best to wait until I see him again on—on Friday."

"Friday?" shouted Trip. "Berlitz wants that stone not later than tomorrow night. Won't you ever learn not to try to think with that flea-sized brain of yours?"

Dora slashed the receiver upon it hook without replying to Trip's final insult. She had intended to give him the ring on Friday, pretending that she had had another engagement with Blanding. But Trip Hagar had dared to say she could not think. Well, she would show him that she was cleverer than he.

Her eyelids fluttered furiously and the dimples in her flaming cheeks became deep,

hard lines. She'd show Trip Hagar a thing or two!

The turquoise was beautiful and she liked it. She wanted to keep it, and now that Trip had acted so mean she *would* keep it. Trip couldn't make her give it up if she didn't want to, and she'd see to it that he didn't take it away from her by force.

At the door of the drug-store, Dora paused, then hurried to the shelf on which lay a thick and dog-eared telephone book.

In his anger, Trip had accidentally mentioned the name of the jeweler who had made the duplicate that Dora had slipped on Blanding's finger. If she could persuade the jeweler to make a second duplicate of the turquoise, all would be well.

Dora ordered an ice-cream soda and proceeded to lay her plans for showing Trip a thing or two.

IV

FRIDAY night at eleven o'clock, Dora telephoned to Trip. Her voice, as she asked him to meet her at the Automat nearby, was cheerful and confident. Trip hastened to the tryst, believing that she had succeeded in making the exchange of rings.

"That's your duplicate," said Dora bluntly. She passed it to him, wrapped loosely in a paper napkin. "I'm sorry but—there it is."

Too surprised to be angry, too disappointed to speak coherently, Trip gazed across the rim of his coffee cup at Dora's fluttering eyelids and dimpling smile. He reflected that she didn't look sorry.

"Blanding was leery," continued Dora energetically, "and he held my hand all the time I had the ring on. I'm sorry, but—"

Trip surreptitiously unwrapped the worthless bauble and eyed its waxy luster disgustedly. But he was not thinking of

the imitation turquoise nor of the marvelous skill of the imitator. He was wondering why he doubted the authenticity of Dora's failure.

"You're pretty peppy for a total loss," he remarked.

For an instant Dora was frightened at this evidence of Trip's suspicion. Then she rallied to her own defense.

"Why wouldn't I be peppy?" she demanded gaily. "I'm through being nice to that old dub forever. You've no idea how—"

"You've got to make another date with him and try it again," declared Trip. "This means money."

Sudden hatred flared in Dora's eyes. She shuddered at the memory of Blanding's brief kiss.

"I don't care what it means," she said hotly. "I'm through being an old man's darling and—I'm through being a young man's slave!"

She rose and strolled past the cashier, through the small lobby with its soda fountain, and walked alone into the deserted street.

Trip's suspicions became absolute knowledge as he gazed after her. There was a flaunting assurance about the slender shoulders and well-poised head that hinted of bravado.

"That dumb-bell's double-crossed me. I'll bet a—" his eyes fell upon the cashier—"I'll bet a nickel she's double-crossed me. But—I've got to prove it."

V

TWELVE hours later Trip risked his liberty by appearing at the Wall Street office of Darius Blanding. His business-like manner served him well below the dead-line where men of his profession were not allowed to go. His steady nerve guided his tongue as he told the reception clerk that his name was Higgins and that his business was antique jewelry.

Entering the severely plain office of the great financier, Trip caught a glimpse of a blue-green stone as Blanding brushed an imaginary hair from his high forehead. For an instant Trip believed that he had seen the original turquoise, but he could not be sure.

"My client has commissioned me to purchase the Minibilh turquoise, Mr. Blanding," began the pseudo Mr. Higgins briskly, "providing, of course, that the one you have is genuine."

The old man shook his head. "The stone is not for sale."

The reply was in the nature of a dismissal. Blanding glanced suggestively at the door.

Trip smiled pleasantly and held his ground. He was determined to look closely at the turquoise before he left the office. He wanted proof of Dora's deception before he took steps to frighten her into giving up the treasure that she might not have.

"Are you sure," he asked, "that yours is the famous Minibilh?"

Darius Blanding looked up quickly, angrily. "Examine it and decide for yourself," he said shortly as he laid the bronze ring upon the desk.

Trip's hand trembled as he lifted the ring. He had a duplicate in his pocket and, if Dora had told the truth about her failure to make the exchange, Trip intended to attempt it, even while the old man watched him. With a sigh that was half relief and half gasping fury, he laid the ring upon the desk and moved toward the door.

"My client will be very much disappointed," he said, "but, personally, I do not wonder that you refuse to part with the stone."

Blanding allowed himself the luxury of a chuckle. "The stone will never be on the market again," he said. "Tell your client that he may as well give up hope."

I shall wear the Minibilh turquoise to my grave." He glanced affectionately at the ring as he returned it to his finger.

Trip Hagar lost no time in escaping from lower New York. Alternately cold with fear lest the old man discover his loss and send out an alarm, and burning with anger toward Dora, who had tricked him and Berlitz who had aided her, he hurried uptown. Undoubtedly, the jeweler had advised Dora to wait a few days before turning the turquoise over to him.

Knowing Dora, Trip was able to anticipate her actions while the valuable stone was in her possession. She would reason that the ring was safe as long as she kept it and herself out of sight. She would not venture from her room excepting at night, and then only long enough to eat her dinner. During these brief absences she would probably hide the ring in her room rather than on her person.

To a casual observer on the subway, Trip was merely an alert young businessman, hastening to a luncheon engagement. But, had it been possible to read Trip's mind, this same observer would have detected no intention of wasting time in a restaurant. He was concerned solely with a certain rooming-house from the front windows of which he could see the door of the house in which Dora lived.

All he had to do was to secure that room for a week and wait until he saw Dora leave the house. Then he would search her room, find the turquoise, and compel Berlitz to pay ten thousand instead of five thousand for it.

VI

WITHOUT regret, Dora Dell remained indoors throughout the sultry Saturday. She had proved herself cleverer than Trip Hagar and she patted herself upon the mental back. She was cleverer than Berlitz, too. He thought she was going to

sell the turquoise to him, but she wasn't. The stone was hers and she meant to keep it.

She had thought of a wonderful hiding-place for her treasure—a place where no one would ever think of looking. And at dark she hurried to a nearby restaurant for her dinner, serenely confident that the ring was safe no matter how thoroughly her room might be searched.

Still calm and unruffled, Dora returned to her room. At the door she paused, her quick fear quieted by the sight of a cold-cream jar upon the battered oak dresser. She picked her way carefully through the hopeless disorder of the room and caught up the cold-cream jar. Her hand trembled a little as she lifted the lid and thrust her finger through the perfumed cream to the bottom of the jar.

Then she laughed. What did she care about a disordered room, a mattress slashed by a razor-blade, a rug heaped in the center of the floor and covered with the contents of her dresser drawers? The searcher had not found the turquoise!

She laughed again and glanced into the mirror to note the pictorial effect, and saw a message scrawled upon the glass with a piece of soap.

"Blanding is wise," she read and her self-satisfaction crumbled. It had been easy to outwit Trip, whom she hated, but Blanding—he could call upon the police to help him.

It occurred to her that Trip had got word to Blanding in order to get even with her. Trip was mean enough to do a thing like that—he was mean enough to do anything. Hatred for the man with whom she had once thought herself in love flared anew and Dora shook a small fist defiantly at the writing upon the mirror.

"Blanding'll never get this ring," she declared as she clutched the cold-cream jar to her heart. "And neither will you, Trip

Hagar! I'll smash the old thing first or I'll—"

Instantly her face cleared. Berlitz had told her the stone was worth a thousand dollars. She would sell him the ring before he found out that "Blanding was wise." Then she would go to Chicago to visit her married sister until it was safe to return to New York.

Still carrying the cold-cream jar, Dora hurried out of the house and made her way to the dingy basement store of B. Berlitz. Behind her, a cap drawn down over his forehead, crept Trip Hagar.

They arrived at the store about the same time, but Trip remained outside until Berlitz and Dora were engaged in conversation.

Inside the store, Dora stated the purpose of her call.

"You said the turquoise you copied was worth a thousand dollars," she said. "I want fifteen hundred."

"Let's see it," answered Berlitz.

With a flourish, Dora lifted the lid of the cold-cream jar.

Intent upon the business of extracting the ring from its perfumed bed, she did not see the expression of horror upon the jeweler's florid face. She held the ring toward him, smiling proudly. Berlitz jerked it from her fingers and dashed to the workshop in the rear of the store. Dora waited impatiently during the moment he was gone.

"I want my fifteen hundred," she shrilled, as he returned. Then, as she saw the expression of despairing fury upon his face she paled and her lips began to tremble.

"Why, what's the matter?" she faltered. "Haven't you got the fifteen hundred?"

Berlitz nodded, then shook his head. "I've got it, but—"

The street door opened and closed with a bang. Dora gasped in fright.

"Where's that turquoise?" bellowed Trip, looking from the frightened Dora

to the jeweler, and back again to Dora.

Dora nodded toward Berlitz. "He's got it," she said weakly. "Did—aren't you afraid Blanding will—?"

"Shut up about Blanding. Where's that turquoise?"

Berlitz opened his hand and disclosed a bronze ring set with a mottled, muddy green stone. Gone was all hint of the exquisite color of the turquoise; gone was all trace of its waxy luster.

Trip smiled contemptuously. "None of that!" he snarled. "Come through with the turquoise!"

"This is it," sighed Berlitz. "She's ruined it."

"Ruined it?" Trip turned angrily upon Dora. "What have you done?" he demanded roughly.

"She has ruined the Minibih turquoise," repeated Berlitz. "Nothing will counteract the effect of grease."

"Grease!" shouted Trip.

His eyes fell upon the innocent looking jar in which the ring had been hidden. He caught Dora by the shoulders and whirled her about to face him.

"What do you mean, ruining a valuable stone like that?"

"I didn't do anything to it," sobbed Dora. "I only hid it while I went out to dinner. It wasn't in the cold cream more than an hour."

"An hour!" Berlitz laughed sharply. "In grease cream, fifteen minutes would have been enough."

Trip ignored the jeweler who had unconsciously assisted in destroying the turquoise by making the second duplicate. He retained his hold upon Dora's shoulder.

"Didn't you know that grease—any kind of grease—would soak into the stone and spoil the color?" he asked.

"I didn't know anything," sobbed Dora, "except that you were mean and said I couldn't think. And you searched my

room and wrote that note and—I got scared and—”

“I’ll say you didn’t know anything and always will,” agreed Trip hopelessly. “You *thought* I was mean when I told the truth and you *thought* yourself clever when you put the turquoise in grease cream and you *thought* Blanding was wise because I said so and—”

He stopped for breath and his hold upon

her shoulder relaxed. He snatched up the cold-cream jar and eyed the label disgustedly.

“Guaranteed to contain no harmful ingredients,” he read. “Guaranteed not to—” Trip lifted his arm high above his head. “You dumb-bell!”

Once more he hurled the insult in her face as the cold-cream jar crashed to the floor at his feet. “You dumb-bell!”



A beautiful stranger who gave a young man her bag of jewels . . . a wild taxi ride that cost \$500—these are two of the many thrills in “The Taxi Vamp”—see SAUCY STORIES for August 15th.

The Lost Heiress

By Roger Wade



DETECTIVE BARKER prided himself upon the fact that he never forgot a face. Yet he could not place the man who sat opposite him in the smoking-car. He was certain he had seen him before and under unusual circumstances. Perhaps it would come to him. Maybe the man would betray himself by a gesture, a turn of the head, or some personal habit that Barker would recognize.

The train was puffing through the prairies of the Middle West. In about an hour they would be in St. Louis. The smoking-car was deserted save for these two.

Barker looked him over carefully. A well-dressed chap in his early thirties. His dark hair was parted in the middle, but not too straight nor too smooth to give him the appearance of a fastidious college youth. He looked like a successful young businessman; wholesome and clean-cut.

It was part of Barker's duty to know by sight those crooks wanted by the police. Somehow he could not help but place this chap—handsome though he was, and certainly not of a criminal cast of features—in that class. He did not look like the average jailbird, and yet—

Suddenly it came to him. He gasped. Three years ago. He remembered now. It had to do with a certain affair that was still unsolved; a riddle that had never been answered.

At the time, following a clue, he had looked for the chap, but in vain. He had mysteriously disappeared. If it were the same man, the opportunity he had long waited for had come. And yet Barker was not quite sure.

A bold idea came to him. He would chance it.

He couldn't very well arrest the chap on the suspicion that he was the man he was looking for. That way he would learn nothing. But if he could lead him into betraying himself. . . .

The man finished his cigarette. With a yawn he tossed it through the half-open window. He patted his knees as if he were going to rise and return to the Pullman. Barker knew he must detain him. The old trick of offering a cigar came to his mind. He felt in his pocket. He had but three left, and they must do him until he got to the city.

"Have a cigar?" he asked.

"Thanks. I never smoke cigars. Cigarettes do me," he smiled in reply.

The ice was broken.

"Hard trip," said Barker, trying another course.

"Hate it," replied the man. "I'll be glad to get home."

"You live in St. Louis, too?" said Barker, adding that last. As a rule he preferred to let the other fellow ask questions. But he had to keep the conversation going.

"Yes. You in business there?"

Good. This was more like it. Just

the question Barker had been wanting.

"No," he answered. "Not in business. It's my old home. I'm a detective."

Did the fellow's eyes narrow? Or did Barker imagine it? Telling people he was a detective was something Barker never did. If a person were guilty, it threw him on his guard. Yet, in this case, in view of the scheme he had in mind, it was necessary.

"That must be interesting work," said the man, lighting another cigarette.

"Yes. One way of looking at it. Still, it isn't as satisfactory as most occupations. A businessman can close his desk at night, and he's done for the day."

"A thirty-dollar-a-week clerk maybe," laughingly interrupted the man.

"Well, what I mean is: he knows the problems of his business can't be taken up again until tomorrow. But the detective is always on the job. Searching his mind for that subtle hint that may lead to the solution of the case he is working on. . . . Sometimes he puzzles along for years—and then never comes to a satisfactory conclusion."

Barker settled himself in his chair. He saw that the other man was interested. He continued:

"There's one affair that always baffled me. It's still unsolved. I don't want to bore you, but would you like to hear it?"

"By all means," replied the other, politely.

"It goes back three years. Maybe you will remember it, if you were in New York at the time. Were you in New York three years ago?"

The man hesitated a moment, and then said, without flinching:

"No!"

He was perfect master of himself,

but Barker felt that he had hesitated just a moment too long. Yet, if he had deliberately told a falsehood, he had not betrayed himself too much.

"We called it the case of the lost heiress," continued Barker, scrutinizing him closely. "The daughter of a millionaire banker, Katherine Cornwall by name, mysteriously disappeared. Perhaps you remember?"

The man gave an embarrassed little laugh.

"Something," he said. "It's so long ago. And there's so much of that sort of thing. I suppose there are any number of unsolved murders, robberies, disappearances, and so forth."

"Yes. But sometimes, after many years, the truth comes to light. A detective never gives up hope. And I've always felt that some day I should stumble on the story of what happened to Katherine Cornwall."

The man was frowning, but otherwise he seemed no more than politely interested.

"He's either innocent," thought Barker to himself, "or else he's the coolest scamp alive." He preferred to believe the latter. Otherwise what he was doing would be without point.

II

"I was called on the case," continued Barker, "being at that time on the New York force. While we never found Katherine Cornwall, still there was one clue—one missing thread. Should we ever discover that, we might perhaps know the truth. Elusive at the best. But I'm ahead of my story.

"I went to the girl's home, one of these big, imposing mansions not far from Fifth Avenue. This was the morning following her disappearance.

"From what I could learn, she had left the house the afternoon before to ride in the park. The groom had brought her horse around to the entrance. She had dismissed him, saying she would return about four o'clock. She usually rode alone. Well, four o'clock came, and she didn't return. Five . . . six . . .

"The groom began to wonder if something hadn't happened to her. He strolled over toward Central Park, but could see nothing of her. So he went to the stables. There he found a policeman waiting, with the horse. The officer said he had found it nibbling at the shrubbery in the park. . . .

"You see, Miss Cornwall was known by sight to the mounted police. So he knew to whom the mare, a thoroughbred animal, belonged.

"The officer, when questioned, said that he had seen her gallop along the bridle-path. She had nodded to him as she passed by. That had been about an hour before he found the riderless mare. . . .

"To the best of our knowledge, he was the last person who ever saw her. She had simply ridden into Central Park and vanished as completely as if the earth had swallowed her up. And from that day to this nothing has been seen of her.

"Needless for me to go into detail as to what we did at first—the obvious things, of course, like searching the park, inquiring at the hospitals and the morgues. It might have been an accident, you know. But nothing came of that. We even went through the underworld with a fine-tooth comb. Her father, a distinguished, aristocratic old gentleman, was willing to spend every dollar he had. And it did cost him a pretty sum.

"To me there was only one thing

to be done—discover a motive. I began to question everybody: her parents; the servants; her friends. All that I was able to discover was that her home life was very happy. She was popular with her circle of friends. Had everything she desired. But I asked them all. . . .

"Not even her fiancé could tell me anything. She was to have had dinner that evening with him. He was a prominent young attorney of excellent family and with something of a reputation at the bar. Not a handsome chap, but I have no doubt he would have made a first-rate husband—as husbands go. Both of the parents seemed satisfied with the match. The engagement had even been announced. He was all broken up over it, as you can imagine. So were they all. . . .

"It's rather a facer to have someone you love vanish without a word of farewell, and for no apparent reason. Death is much easier to bear. . . ."

"I should imagine so," put in the man to whom Barker was telling the story. So far, his face had been expressionless, a mask that concealed his thoughts.

But the point that Barker was hoping to make was yet to come.

"From what I could find out concerning Miss Cornwall," he continued, "she was a healthy, normal girl. Not given to fads. From the way her friends praised her virtues, she didn't seem human. But that was three years ago, and girls weren't as silly then as they are today."

The man smiled.

"However," said Barker, "I asked her mother if I couldn't look through her rooms. At first Mrs. Cornwall was averse to this. A mid-Victorian modesty, I suppose. I thought it odd at the time. Later I

had still more occasion to wonder. She wanted to stand by my side all the time. . . .

"Now, no detective can work that way. I finally told her and asked to be left alone, assuring her that Miss Cornwall's possessions were safe in my hands.

"When I started looking about, it seemed so futile. Everything was in order. On the dresser was a framed portrait of her fiancé, as it should be. Other portraits of friends were about the room; people with whom I had already talked. In her desk I discovered some correspondence. Naturally, in a case like this, I looked the letters over. But they told me nothing. I had hoped that she might keep a diary. But it seems that she was too sensible a girl for even that bit of feminine foolishness. . . .

"And yet, I *did* stumble on something that has always puzzled me. In the bottom of the desk was a picture, cut from a newspaper, of a college football hero. I slipped it into my pocket. It might be nothing more than a romantic girl's fancy. But it made her seem more real to me. For girls do cut out of the papers pictures of college athletes and movie stars.

III

"I INQUIRED of Mrs. Cornwall if her daughter knew the man. She said no. At least, he had never been entertained in their home. He might have been an acquaintance, of course. . . . Well, I went to see the chap."

Barker was watching the other's face closely. But he was gazing out of the window, seemingly indifferent. And yet, from the way he was listening, Barker knew he was not bored.

"He was in business with a broker's firm on lower Broadway. I

asked him if he knew Miss Cornwall. He told me he did not, and that he had never even met her. Naturally I didn't tell him that I had discovered his picture in her desk. But—now comes something that has led me to believe he lied to me that afternoon:

"One day I went to see Mrs. Cornwall. Good Lord! I was at their home so often the butler would let me in without quibbling. I was waiting in the hall. Mrs. Cornwall was engaged, the butler told me. Then, from the drawing-room, came this chap I have told you about. He gave me a curt nod and left the house.

"The business I had in hand waited until I had asked Mrs. Cornwall what he was doing there. She seemed surprised at my question, as if it were an impertinence, and replied that it was a personal matter. And that was all I could get out of her. I reminded her that I had asked her a few days before if she had known the man, and she had told me she did not. She explained that she had never seen him until this day. That was all. . . .

"Yet I could not help but feel that she was concealing something from me. From that day her manner changed. She seemed more reconciled to her daughter's loss.

"Now, we detectives work on hunches. And I felt that there was something in this visit that had to do with the missing girl. I also discovered that Mrs. Cornwall had given this man a check for ten thousand dollars. I found that out at the bank a few days later."

"And what did you make of that?" asked the man.

"One of two things: Either she was purchasing some stocks—which made me wonder why she didn't do

that through her own broker—or else she had given him that money for some very definite reason. Perhaps for information concerning her daughter's whereabouts. It was much easier to believe the latter. . . .

"Meanwhile, we kept an eye on the chap. His actions were above suspicion. He led the life of the average New Yorker, was engaged to be married, and we often saw him with the girl. I suppose I should have arrested him. And yet that was not possible. There was nothing to accuse him of. Get your evidence first, and then arrest the guilty party, is the best proceeding. . . .

"Then, one day, he, too, vanished. His employers told us that he had left for Chicago to go into business there. But we found that was not true. No one seemed to care much if he had disappeared. I never saw him again."

Barker paused and lighted a fresh cigar.

"It was only a thread at that. And yet I have always felt that he could tell us something concerning Katherine Cornwall. His picture in her desk; his coming to see her mother; his strange disappearance; and the check for ten thousand dollars. I have made up my mind that, should I ever run across him, I should arrest him on the spot."

"That's very interesting," said the young man. "Very interesting story. Tell me, how do most detectives solve problems? Do they come to it by a logical conclusion, or do they stumble on the answer by accident?"

"It's usually an accident," admitted Barker, grumbling. "The one thing we need to know to make our chain of evidence complete cannot be found by deduction."

The man rose to go.

"Just a moment," said Barker. "I

suppose you wonder why I have told you this?"

"Oh, not at all."

"It's because I think you are the man I have been looking for. You are the one person who can tell me what happened to Katherine Cornwall."

"That's rather a bold statement. Perhaps Katherine Cornwall herself could tell you that," he answered, mockingly.

"At any rate, consider yourself under arrest!"

The man whistled softly to himself. He glanced at the door. If escape was on his mind, Barker laughed.

"Impossible," he said, "unless you want to risk your life by jumping from a moving train."

"I wasn't thinking of that," said the man.

"Sit down," said Barker. "I want you to tell me what you know. I want the truth!"

"Suppose I do tell you, will you give me your word of honor that it will go no further—that you will let it be your secret as well as mine?"

Barker promised.

IV

"It was all so very simple, I have often wondered why you never stumbled on the one link in the chain that would have solved the mystery. I call it a mystery. It was, to you. Not to me, nor to Mrs. Cornwall. . . .

"Katherine's father was an aristocrat, as you say. He was also an old tyrant. You see, there was a young man in love with Miss Cornwall. A decent sort of a chap, I believe. She returned his affections, but her father opposed the match. There was nothing for the young people to do but elope. They did. She went

riding in the park. A car was waiting. She stepped in and rode off. . . .

"Miss Cornwall lived in New York all the time you were so busy hunting for her. How did she escape detection? Well, I once knew of a crook who lived next to the jail. He was so bold about it that the police never thought of looking in the most obvious place. The same was true of Miss Cornwall. She did, however, disguise herself with a wig. Later, she and this young chap were married. Mrs. Cornwall, who approved the match, was present. . . .

"They have never told Mr. Cornwall, who would even today raise an awful fuss. After a honeymoon in Europe, the two lovers returned to

this country, and have lived happily ever after. It was all so very simple that it isn't even thrilling."

"How do you happen to know this?" asked Barker.

"I am surprised that you would ask me that!" replied the young man.

From his pocket he drew forth a snapshot.

"This is my wife!" he said.

It was a photograph of Katherine Cornwall.

"And if you are stopping over in St. Louis," the young man continued, "won't you come and see us? After all these years, I know you would like to see, face to face, the girl you have been looking for the past three years."



THERE is really nothing to be learned about women, but man never tires of learning it.



By Dorothy Donnell Calhoun

EVERYONE connected with the movie industry is busy trying to find an alibi to explain away the uncomfortable fact that in February of this year fewer people by eight million went to the movies than in the corresponding month last year.

John Griffith Wray, the director, thinks the trouble is injudicious methods of exploitation. The public has been plied with superlatives. Every new picture is claimed to be "the most marvelous, most artistic, most costly, most sensational" picture ever made. Alliteration's artful aid abounds in the announcements: "dazzlingly daring; distractingly devilish." Capital letters sprinkle the advertisements as thickly as the freckles adorning Wes Barry's map: "She was Mad for Money," "She Yearned for the rightful Joys of Youth," or "If You found Your Wife was holding Hands with Another Man by Radio, what would You Do?"

Mr. Wray believes that this ring-lingo may be successful for circuses where rustics will stand, forgetting that the inside of their mouths is getting sunburned, while they read of the Amazing

Bi-Horned Amphibious Bovalpus and then pay to go in and see a water buffalo. But that the dignified drama of the screen can dispense with ballyhoo.

An advertisement of a new photoplay written truthfully and modestly, Mr. Wray claims, would appeal more strongly. Such an ad we here submit, and let our readers draw their own conclusions:

The new Goldie Gay picture, "Without Benefit of Reno," has a theme that was old when Nero was spanked by his father for playing with matches at the age of four. The star who plays the part of a schoolgirl does as well as could be expected when one considers her age—thirty-seven. A million dollars was NOT spent on the production, and the management is willing to swear to this before a notary. The handsome hero did not risk his life by jumping from a tower into the sea—we used a tailor's dummy instead. The only time the hero ever risked his life was by making personal appearances after

the showing of his pictures. We did not make the picture for Art's sake but for the sake of our lord-lord.

II

ELINOR GLYN, the novelist, evidently believes that the recent slump in movie attendance has come from the absurd reports that there are photoplay actors who aren't all they should be. She plans to remedy the situation by writing a scenario called *The Eyes of Truth*, which will picture the life of Hollywood society truthfully, showing that a moraller, uprighter, altogether righteouser lot of people can't be found anywhere.

The film will be produced by Sol Lesser, maker of the Jackie Coogan pictures. People who have been at Hollywood have told us that "sleigh-riding" is a popular pastime out there, and surely that sounds innocent! Maybe Elinor knows—she's lived there almost a month, and one can do a great deal even in Three Weeks.

Whatever is the matter, Mr. Hays will fix it.

Mae Murray was a guest at the gathering of the Motion Picture Directors' Association the other day and she describes the applause which greeted the new Dictator of the Film when he rose to speak:

"There was a perfect fever of enthusiasm," she says, "Hays fever—"

(They all do it, even the best of 'em!)

One chill morning during the filming of *The Prisoner of Zenda* several of the principals in the picture were waiting before the big set of the Castle of Zenda on the mainland side of the moat. A sharp wind whipped up the water. Stuart Holmes, who is Black Michael in the picture, started things by remarking to Lewis Stone, the man

who portrays the Prisoner:

"Doesn't the wind off the water zenda chill through you?"

For a moment Stone was speechless at the enormity of the crime. Then he replied furiously: "None of your bon moats, Stuart!"

Before we leave the *Prisoner of Zenda* we may state that the total cost of this immense picture undertaking was \$1,118,453.16. There is something that rings true about this statement—we think it is the sixteen cents.

Somehow that sixteen cents intrigues us more than the million-odd dollars. What was it spent for? Cough-drops for Ingram? A hairnet for Alice Terry's golden locks? A shine for Barbara La Marr's high-heeled adventuress slippers? If only press agents would tell us things like that.

Mr. Ingram directed the coronation scenes of this photoplay by radiophone, calling up his sub-directors scattered over the lot at the instant he needed them. These, in turn, shouted their directions to their section of the mob from their hiding-places—for they wore radio-receivers over their ears, which are hardly what a well-dressed man would wear to a Ruritanian coronation. Follow a few other facts about this photoplay masterpiece:

More people contributed to making the picture than the population of Oswego, New York.

Forty-eight miles of film were run through the camera.

The scenario contained more pages than H. G. Wells' "Outline of History."

At one time there were four hundred and thirty-two cooks on the Metro payroll to feed the army of supers.

The completed picture cost almost twice as much as Gainsborough's "Blue Boy."

(Continued on page 126)

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YOU can make \$15 to \$40 weekly in your spare time writing show cards. No canvassing or soliciting. We insure you by our new simple Directograph system, pay you cash each week and guarantee you steady work. Write for full particulars and free booklet. WEST-ANGUS SHOW CARD SERVICE 75 Colborne Building Toronto, Can.



6 Beautiful Art Studies \$1

ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPHS OF SEMI-NUBES

Charming pictures of the human figure as it actually is, in six artistic poses. All the loveliness and purity of Nature's finest handwork in these studio photos, posed by the famous model "Jacqueline." Each of the six photos is 2 1/2 x 6 1/2 and carefully arranged in artistic folder. Please order as once if quick shipment is desired. From, postpaid, per set of six—Cash with Order \$1.00, C. O. D. (Pay Postman) \$1.10. Address Studio ES

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Get along better, make more money, develop a winning personality, learn to know people as they are. Send 5 cents (stamp) for "Personal Power," a little book that points the way.

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FREE DIAMOND RING OFFER

Just to advertise our famous Hawaiian Ice diamonds—the greatest discovery the world has ever known. We will send absolutely free this 14K gold ring, set with a 1/2 carat Hawaiian Ice diamond—a beautiful ring too, postage paid. Pay postmaster \$1.48 C.O.D. charges to cover postages, boxing, advertising, handling, etc. If you can tell it from a real diamond return and money refunded. Only 10,000 given away. Send us money. Answer quick. Send size of finger. KRAUTH & REED, DEPT. HZ, Masonic Temple, Chicago

Beauty Yours! Secrets Centuries Old—Exposed! Bring Magic-Like Results Quickly.

YOU CAN be beautiful, alluring, charming!

Once I was homely! The portrait above is living proof of what I can do for you, too. If your features are fairly regular you can be as temptingly beautiful as the women you have envied. My Secrets of Beauty tell you how—secrets based on mysteries of the French Courts, toilet rites which kept the flaming French beauties young for many years longer

Banish
Coarse Pores
Wrinkles
Pimples
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Superfluous Hair
Oily Skin

than our modern women, in mysteries which were hidden for centuries. There and many other beauty secrets prepared to give you a soft, velvety skin, flushed with the glow of youth, to make you the center of ardent admiration, to hold your figure as Nature intended, are all exposed in my book: "Confessions of a Beauty Expert."

Also with this Free handsomely illustrated book I send you Free complete information on my methods of how to Remove Wrinkles, Remove Coarse Pores, Banish Blackheads, Pimples, Freckles and Oily Skin; How to Fix the Figure, Remove Arms; Remove

Superfluous Hair; Grow Beautiful Eyebrows and Lashes; Clean the Skin of Acne; Make Hair Soft, Lustrous, Fluffy.

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Absolutely no obligation to you. Just clip this coupon, sign name and address and mail to me today. Don't pass this golden chance to win Real Beauty! Investigate!—It costs you nothing to write and you'll never regret it all your days, dear lady. Personal reply at once.

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Please send complete information; also your free book: "Confessions of a Beauty Expert."

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DR. QUAYLE'S SANITARIUM, MADISON, OHIO Dept. P

(Continued from page 124)

III

The American director has his troubles, but they're nothing compared to the troubles of a director in a foreign land, according to Herbert Brennon, who has just returned from filming *Nero* with a cast of several thousand temperamental Italians.

He tells us that in the middle of everything, when a scene is in full swing, the players knock off for a siesta of two hours. If, on waking up, they decide it is too hot to work, they placidly return to their naps for the rest of the afternoon. The Italian calendar contains so many saints' days, festal days and other holidays that there are only a few left on which to work.

"Herb," however, is known to be a hog for hard labor. At 7 A. M.—day-light-saving time—he may be seen over at the studio rehearsing himself in the scenes to be shot that day, taking first one part, then another, making love to himself, embracing himself, hopping about the stage, avoiding chairs that aren't there yet, and pounding imaginary tables.

By the time everybody has arrived he knows every bit of business to be carried out in every scene. They say that two is company, but Herbert is a one-man company all by himself.

No director ever knows just what he's going to be up against. In *Her Glided Cage*, Gloria Swanson's next picture, Sam Wood had to direct two snails in action. He had the snails, but he couldn't get the action! There is simply no use in being rough with a snail. If you once get his back up, he isn't good for anything but soup, and even then the soup can be eaten only by people without any imagination.

It took two hours of profane silence on the part of Al Gilks, the cameraman, to get a six-foot flash of a snail marathon!

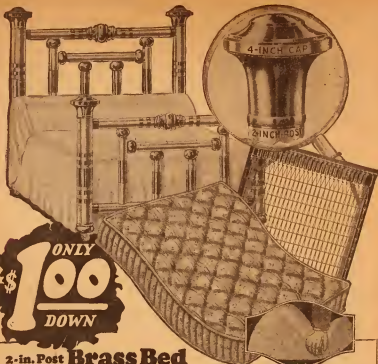
TWENTY-THREE cameramen of Hollywood have offered to provide Sir Arthur Conan Doyle with any number of spirit pictures for his lectures on the Beyond and Points West. They feel that the pictures of Ectoplasim—which is the new word for a soul in the nude—are all well enough, but not particularly good press-agentry for the Future Life. Some scenes of Souls at Play, on the other hand, would be, as Sherlock Holmes would say, conclusive—a motion picture of the late Anthony Comstock shimmying, for instance, or something of the sort.

Speaking of souls, Estelle Taylor, who plays the cold and alluring vampire in Fox's *Fool There Was*, has received an invitation from Clivette, "The Man with the Wonderful Hands," famous as a painter of vamps, to come down to The Soul-Light Shrine in Greenwich Village and have her soul painted.

Those who used to rest a foot on the brass rail of the Hoffman House bar will remember Clivette's picture of "The Satyr and the Nymphs" which hung above the bartender's head in that old headache-foundry. It is Clivette's daughter who is the reincarnation of Sappho—so she says, and who should know if she doesn't?

Arch Reeve, sizable President of the W. M. P. A., has branded as greatly exaggerated the report that he personally occupied two boxes at the recent jollification. The rumor that he was to play the title rôle in *Three Gentlemen of Verona* is also false, he claims.

At this same jollification, Jackie Coogan did the "Chicago" and made a colossal hit, and Ernest Belcher presented a bally good ballet. As Ring Lardner would say: "If these young misses are a fair sample of ballot dancers, we see no reason why all women



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Send the coupon and only \$1.00 today and we'll ship you this complete, 3-piece brass bed outfit on approval. Nothing so magnificent in a home—nothing adds so much richness and splendor as a luxurious and elegant brass bed. Always clean and sanitary. See the handsome design and massive construction. Get this cut price offer.

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 Reduced bed \$1.00. Only special advertised 3-piece Bed Quilt—brass link, quilt, cotton mattress. (I can't have 30 days free trial. I'll have the quilt.) I will pay you \$3.00 monthly. If not satisfied, I can return the outfit within 30 days and you are to refund 1 day money and any freight or express charges paid. ☐ 3-Piece Bed Quilt No. B369A. \$34.95.

No extra charge for credit. No discount for cash. No. C. O. D.

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Rock-bottom price now. Lowest since before the war. Send the coupon at once with only \$1.00 and we will ship you 3-piece outfit—bed, spring and cotton mattress—on 30 days trial. No risk, no obligation. Money refunded if not satisfied.

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